METRO / A17

Lacson drops out of Manila mayoral race due to residency requirements

SPORTS / A21

Promoter Arum gives Barrera deadline to fight Pacquiao

WORLD/ A20

New Year bomb blasts in Bangkok kill three, hurt 38, including 9 foreigners

NEWS / A2

Philippine Navy rescues 50 fishermen held by armed men off Tawi-Tawi

Bilibid 'Starbucks' offers coffee, bread, livelihood

MAY ESPRESSO NA PARA SA MGA PRESO!

By Jocelyn R. Uy

INMATES LANGUISHING in the maximum security compound of the New Bilibid Prisons in Muntinlupa City will soon be able to indulge their craving for latte, pastries and sweets.

BILIBID/ A15

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
Tuesday, January 2, 2007 ★★ 4 sections / Vol. 22 / No. 25 P18 website: inquirer.net

'2007 election crucial to end political crisis'

By Michael Lim Ubac and Christine O. Avendaño

MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION LEADERS IN THE House of Representatives agreed yesterday that the midterm elections in May would play a crucial part in ending the political crisis that has bedevilled the country for nearly two years.

They said the coming elections would set the

2007 ELECTION/ A15

GI case likened to Garci

New Year toll: 907 injured, no deaths from firecrackers

By Christian V. Esguerra

THE NEWLY BOUGHT "BOGA" seemed a dud. All that the 37-year-old woman heard was the familiar click of the trigger, not the vaunted blast the vendor had told her it could cause.

Frustrated, she held the cannon-like device fashioned out of a PVC pipe next to her ear and pulled the trigger again.

Off went the *boga*, searing the entire left portion of her face.

Call it plain stupidity or recklessness. Like the case of a 10-year-old boy who lit up a whistle bomb he had placed inside his *boga*, apparently trying to use the pipe as a launcher.

The firecracker exploded without the familiar warning whistle, severing his right ear.

If it's any consolation, neither the woman nor the boy was among at least 50 Filipinos who welcomed the New Year with missing fingers or hands.

Altogether, 907 people were injured in revelry to welcome 2007, the Department of Health said yesterday. There was still no final figure on casualties as of press time.

While no one was killed by firecracker blasts—which was "good news," according to Health Secretary Francisco Duque III—at least 14 people died in fires or in violence apparently mostly related to the yearend merrymaking around the country. *(See related story on Page A4)*.

In one incident in Pasig City, one man was killed and nine people were wounded when gunmen on a motorcycle open fired at people holding a street party. *(See related story in Metro, Page A17)*.

The two incidents involving the woman and the boy playing with the *boga* were recounted to the INQUIRER by a Department of Health official.

The *boga* is a bazooka-like noisemaker made out of PVC pipes using denatured alcohol for its incendiary element.

The number of injuries, covering

NEW YEAR/ A4

RODEL ROTONI

MARLONE RUBIO

SPARKLERS, splendidly humongous and cutesy small, from Ayala Avenue in Makati City to a home in Tondo with Gabby and Lance, the light that comes forth is the very same, full of prayers and magic and dreams.

Smith issue adds to GMA political crisis, says Pimentel

By TJ Burgonio, Armand N. Nocum and Norman Bordadora

SENATE MINORITY LEADER Aquilino Pimentel Jr. expects 2007 to be more politically turbulent than the year that just ended because of the administration's mishandling of the custody case of US Marine Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith.

Smith was convicted of raping a young Filipino woman on Dec. 4 last year, sentenced to life imprisonment and ordered detained at the Makati City Jail.

Pimentel said the government's order transferring Smith from the Makati City Jail to US custody close to midnight of Dec. 29 without court authorization would be a flash point this year.

"The impasse over Gloria's legitimacy will come to a head. A number of circumstances will trigger this collision," Pimentel said in an interview.

The opposition claims that President Macapagal-Arroyo stole the 2004 presidential election.

Today, the legal team that opposed Smith's bid to be returned to US custody will ask the Court of Appeals to cite Smith and several Filipino officials for contempt because of his transfer from the Makati City Jail.

Lawyer Harry Roque, an international legal studies expert and a member of the legal team helping private complainant "Nicole," the rape victim, said Smith's move to the US Embassy was a gross disrespect to the appeals court that has yet to decide on the convict's pending appeal to be returned to US custody in accordance with the Visiting Forces Agreement.

"They moved him without waiting for the decision of the court," Roque told the INQUIRER.

Roque said that aside from Smith, others who may have been in contempt of the court were Executive Secretary Eduardo

GI CASE/ A15

2006 one of deadliest for journalists

JOURNALISTS SUFFERED ONE OF THEIR deadliest years ever in 2006, with Iraq, the Philippines and Mexico proving the most dangerous places in the world for the media to work in, two media watchdogs said Sunday.

The Paris-based Reporters sans Frontieres (Reporters Without Borders) said the year saw violent deaths of 81 journalists worldwide, the bloodiest since 1994 when 103 died.

The Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)—which does not separate reporters from their media staff—went much further, saying 2006 was the worst ever, with at least 155 murders, assassinations and unexplained deaths.

"Media have become more powerful and journalism has become more dangerous," said Aidan White, IFJ general secretary. "2006 was the worst year on record—a year of targeting, brutality and continued impunity in the killing

2006/ A4

World parties from Times Square to Mt. Fuji

NEW YORK—MORE THAN ONE MILLION revelers in Times Square greeted 2007 with cheers, kisses and a whopping 3.5 tons of confetti at the city's massive New Year's Eve party.

It was a scene repeated, with some variations, around the globe as millions cheered impressive fireworks celebrations while others saw 2006 capped by bombings and death.

New York's famously flashy New Year's Eve ball dropped down a flagpole to a countdown chorus led by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and US servicemen and women. Longtime host Dick Clark ticked off the final 10 seconds from a television studio.

Partygoers from all over the world poured into the area hours before the clock struck 12 to hold prime viewing spots.

As the ball dropped, Amanda Bermudez, 19, kissed her new husband, Angel Bermudez, 21, a US Army soldier who recently returned from Iraq. They were married Dec. 2 at their home in Fort Hood, Texas, and came to New York for their honeymoon.

"My New Year's resolution is to work on my marriage and be a good mother," said Amanda Bermudez, who just found out she's pregnant.

She also hoped for peace in the Middle East in 2007.

"So he doesn't have to go back," she said, glancing lovingly at her husband.

Police, providing security for the huge crowd, said everything went according to plan. Spectators passed through police checkpoints, no big bags or backpacks were permitted and bomb-sniffing dogs roamed the crowd.

Jurie Smith and his family traveled from Johannesburg, South Africa, for the event. They waited nearly 12 hours to watch the ball drop.

"This is the best place in the world to

WORLD/ A5

Another Bayan Muna leader shot dead

By Ephraim Aguilar
Inquirer Southern Luzon
and Michael Jauclan
Contributor

LEGAZPI CITY—RODOLFO "OMPONG" Alvarado, the Bayan Muna provincial coordinator in Albay, knew his days were numbered, his eldest son said.

Alvarado, 53, was shot dead inside his car on Dec. 31 in Ligao City.

"My father expected his death. While we were watching the news on television on the death of another Bayan Muna member three weeks ago, he told me that was how he wanted to die," Carlo told the INQUIRER at his father's wake.

He said his father would tell the family in jest that upon his death they could just wrap him in a mat or buy the simplest coffin for him.

Alvarado was the 122nd member of Bayan Muna and the 818th victim of political killings since President Macapagal-Arroyo assumed office in 2001, according to Robert de Castro, Bayan Muna national deputy secretary general.

Activists blame military "death squads" for the attacks, a claim repeatedly denied by the Armed Forces.

De Castro said Alvarado, the 206th casualty of political killings in 2006, was the 6th nominee of the Bayan Muna party-list group, which has three seats in the House of Representatives.

Alvarado had served as the regional coordinator of "Tabang Bicol," a relief effort spearheaded by the party-list group in the aftermath of Supertyphoon "Reming."

He was the fourth Bayan Muna mem-

ANOTHER/ A15

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/ARKIBONG BAYAN

RODOLFO ALVARADO, Bayan Muna provincial coordinator in Albay, expected to die the way he did.

E-mail: pr_news@inquirer.com.ph
Text us your feedback: inquirer news name/age/city/message to 2207 (Globe) or 283 (Smart)

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Eastern and Southern Luzon will experience cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers while Visayas and Mindanao will experience cloudy skies with rainshowers and thunderstorms, becoming widespread rains over the eastern Visayas and Mindanao. The rest of the country will be mostly cloudy with light rainshowers.

COMPILED BY KATE PEDROSO, INQUIRER RESEARCH/01/01/07 SOURCE PAGASA

Metro Manila	Cloudy with Rains	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Cloudy with Rains	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Cloudy with Rains	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Cloudy with Rains	Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Cloudy with Rains	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Cloudy with Rains	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

50 'detained' fishermen rescued

By **Charlie C. Señase,** *Inquirer Mindanao*
Dona Pazzibugan and Nancy Carvajal

THE PHILIPPINE NAVY SAID IT RESCUED YESterday 50 fishermen who were held for more than 24 hours by armed men in the high seas off Tawi-Tawi, demanding a ransom from their employer.

The armed men, who claimed to be from the Regional Ports Management Authority of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in Tawi-Tawi fled when two Navy gunboats arrived, Navy spokesperson Commander Giovanni Bacordo said.

He said there was no exchange of gunfire as the armed men returned to their motorboat and fled.

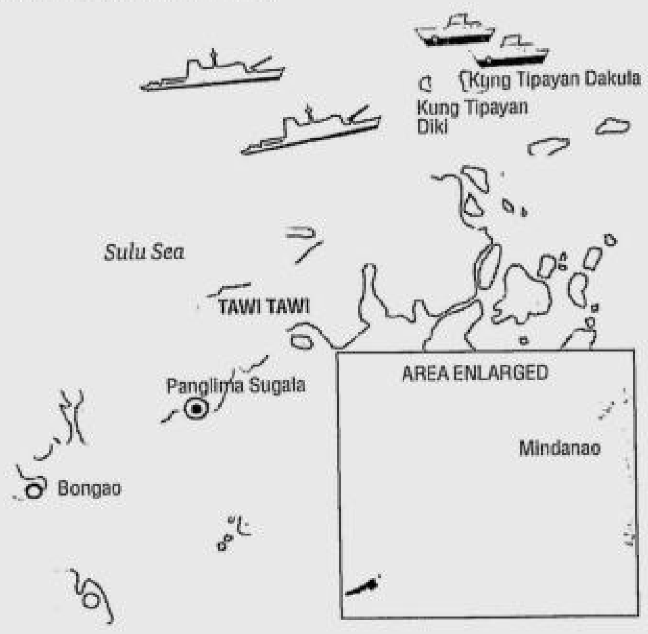
According to Bacordo, the Navy ships crew had responded to a distress call from the Navotas-based Irma Fishing and Trading Inc., the owner of the two boats, the Paul Gerda III and the Queen Bee.

The company reported that seven gunmen boarded the two boats near Kantibayan Dakulan island off Tawi-tawi on Sunday morning and announced that they were holding the 50 men hostage.

It said the gunmen destroyed the fishing boats' radio equipment and demanded a ransom of P500,000 from Irma Fishing, owned by Bobby del Rosario of Navotas.

Irma Fishing operations vice-president Cesar Sugale said the company was able to trace the boats' location though a global positioning system (GPS) installed in all the company's vessels and alerted the military's Western Mindanao Command.

TAWI TAWI RESCUE



In Zamboanga City, Commodore Geronimo Defensor, commander of Naval Forces Western Mindanao, said the gunmen were led by a certain Sicar Bassal who demanded P500,000 for the release of the fishermen.

Defensor said the gunmen were not pirates but were members of the ARMM's Regional Ports Management Authority.

Alejandre Ampatuan, the RPMA-ARMM administrator, denied that there was a demand made for a P500,000 ransom. He said his men apprehended two fishing boats operating inside restricted fishing grounds.

"We found out that their permit only covered Palawan and Sulu and not Tawi-Tawi. My instruction to the unit is to charge and demand port dues and let them go after paying," Ampatuan said.

He also confirmed that Bassal was the head of the RPMA-ARMM task force in Tawi-Tawi that collects port, anchorage, usage and wharfage fees.

Defensor said, however, that, the Irma fishing boats had a permit to operate in the ARMM.

"I don't think there was a miscommunication last Saturday. If the vessel violated certain laws like expiration of their permit, they should not have been apprehended immediately. If there are fees required, it was probably just minimal, not half a million pesos," Defensor said.

Sugale quoted unnamed officials of the RPMA-ARMM as saying that their office had been used many times before to extort money from big fishing boats operating in their area.

He said the extortionists demanded money as "anchorage fee" from the boats.

P200 airport security fee starts this month

THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT authority is intent on imposing a P200 security and development fee on international passengers starting this month but does not quite know how to go about collecting it.

"We want to have the fee integrated in the airline tickets but we still haven't gotten word from the airlines if they've made a decision," Oscar Paras, senior assistant general manager of the Manila International Airport Authority (Miaa).

Paras said that the inclusion of the security fee in the airline tickets would prevent "long lines" at the terminal fee booths.

But if the airlines refuse to take responsibility for collecting the security fee by including it in the airline ticket, the Miaa might just have to ask passengers to pay the P200 security fee at the same booths where they pay the P550 terminal fee.

Last year, airlines operating out of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia) expressed reservations not only about including the service fee in the airline ticket but also about the idea of additional charges being imposed on airline passengers.

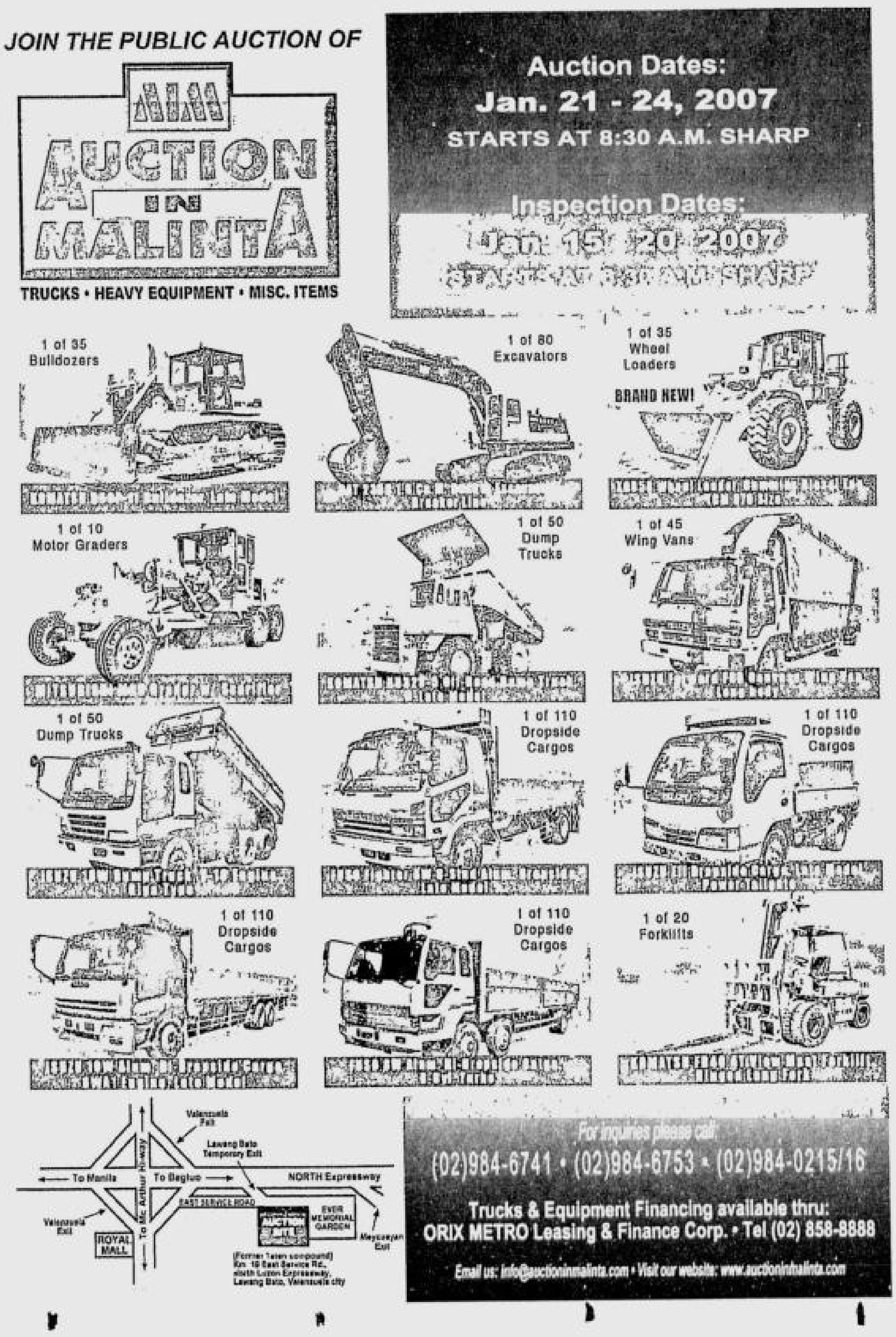
They said passengers should not be burdened with the government's obligation to keep a vital installation like the Naia safe.

But the Miaa said it needed the funds for the upgrading and maintenance of the security equipment at the international airport terminals.

The Miaa would like to start collecting the security fee not later than Jan. 15, according to Robert Uy, executive assistant to the Miaa general manager.

Overseas Filipino workers will be exempt from paying the security fee, which is expected to generate some P700 million annually. *Nikko Dizon*

BURNED CHURCH **ONLY** the wooden pews remain after fire triggered by firecrackers razed the church inside Moonwalk subdivision in Las Pinas during the New Year's Eve celebrations. (*Story on Metro, Page A17*) TESSA SALAZAR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KIDNAPPING DEBATE

Do you want rescuers to come in with guns blazing, or pay ransom?

NEW YORK—HERE IS A LESSON IN LIFE-or-death economics: You are a kidnap victim in a third world country. Do you want rescuers to come in with guns blazing, or pay a ransom?

Movie-style rescues work—about half the time. The rest of the time, insurers say, the victim dies in a hail of bullets. When kidnappers are paid off, the odds of survival improve dramatically.

David Lattin, who handles kidnap and extortion cases for St. Paul Travelers Companies Inc., said that in the 175 cases he has been involved in since 1991, only one person has been killed. And, even though he is a former lieutenant colonel in the US Marines, he has never fired a gun in anger.

The debate on force versus payoff has advocates on both sides.

Both the United States and Israel have a blanket policy of refusing to negotiate with those it calls terrorists.

Corporations, on the other hand, say their first responsibility is the safe return of the victim.

Lattin doesn't debate the policies. He just works through them. "We won't give advice that breaks the law, but when you present the statistics to the local authorities, they will likely allow you to negotiate," said the soft-spoken, bearded and bespectacled Lattin.

Doesn't he encourage kidnappers by paying them off? "Yes, if you pay them $10 million," Lattin says. But negotiation itself costs nothing.

"We use time and subtle resistance," he said. "We say, 'Call me in a week.' We show that the company won't be an easy target." Kidnappers generally play along. Their victim is a resource, and the captors get nothing by killing. "We assess their motivation," Lattin said. "If it's money, we take them down that path."

Sometimes it is not money. In 2004, a European executive disappeared from an airport in Bangladesh and was apparently being held illegally in a local jail. A story in a Singapore newspaper implying that Bangladesh was not a safe place to do business was enough to get him released immediately, Lattin said.

Lattin is willing to make contacts even in the roughest of circles, and it has paid off. In 1992 he saw the head of an insurgency group signing autographs at an airport in Davao City in the Philippines. Lattin grabbed the same flight, sat down with the insurgent and got friendly. He even got the leader's autograph on a postcard, including a "Dear David" salutation.

Later he handled a company facing extortion by the same insurgent group. He showed a copy of the card to the local union leader, who sent it to the group's top leadership. The extortion ended the same day, Lattin said.

Sometimes the payment is small. When Haitian gunmen kidnapped two Canadians off the streets of Port-au-Prince, it took only a week to get them released. The thugs had demanded $2 million. They got $4,000. In another case, the kidnap ended when the abductors' manifesto was published in the local newspaper.

Lattin said he always uses local talent to communicate with the abductors. In one case, a company in Mexico hired a former FBI agent from Puerto Rico who stumbled when translating the kidnappers' local slang. "They contemptuously said, 'Who's the 'Rican?'" Lattin recalled.

The local communicator has a script for each contact with the kidnappers, and cannot deviate from it. The communicator also does not know the end game, such as how much the company might be willing to pay. The game can be played out over days, weeks or even months.

Lattin, 53, lives in Wallowa, Oregon, and spends a lot of time traveling, since a lead negotiator is required at the scene as well as one at corporate headquarters. In Rio de Janeiro abductions usually end in 48 hours; in Colombia they can last for nine months, he said.

Despite eschewing a swashbuckler image, Lattin is well known in the industry and director Taylor Hackford asked him to review the script of his 2000 movie on kidnapping: "Proof of Life," which stars Russell Crowe.

Lattin said the script was accurate until the shootout at the end. "That was pure Hollywood," he said. *REUTERS*

PRESIDENTIAL FAMILIES

The Holidays with Presidential Families

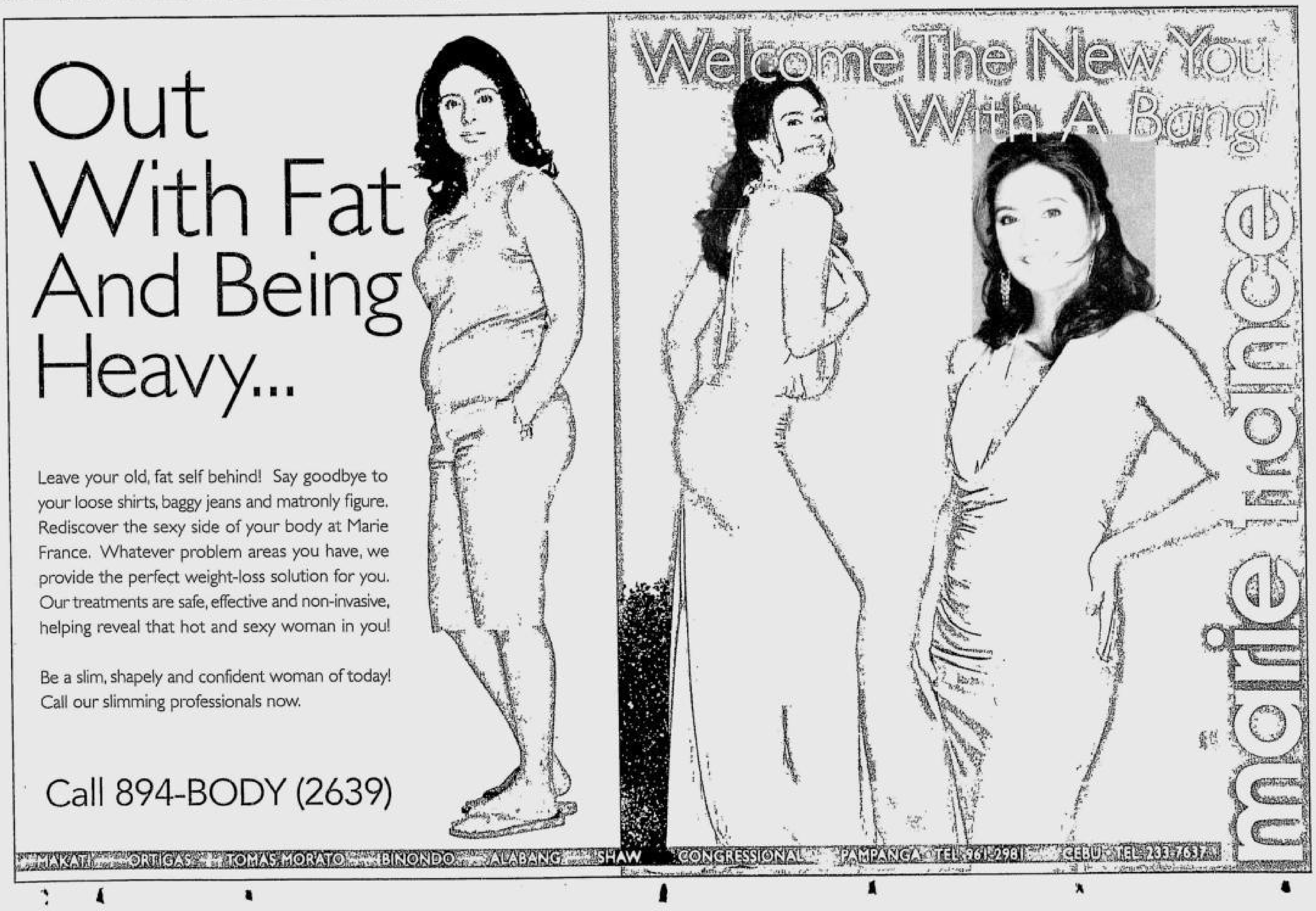
INNOCENCE AND LAUGHTER AT THE MANSION
GRANDCHILDREN of President Arroyo, Ivee (left) and Mikaela warm the New Year's Day at the Mansion House in Baguio City where the Arroyos welcomed the New Year.
MALACAÑANG PHOTO/PCPO

GMA FAMILY
THE ARROYOS are a rhapsody in white and blue in this photo which was used as the First Family's Christmas card. From left, Juan Miguel "Mikey" Arroyo and wife Angela with their daughters Eva Engelique and Mikaela Gloria, Luli, Mr. Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo, President Arroyo and Diosdado "Dato" Arroyo with wife Kakai and daughter, Eva Victoria .
MALACANANG PHOTO

ERAP VISITS MOTHER.
ERAP goes home to visit his 102-year-old mother. Story on Page A2
JOAN BONDOC

THE RAMOSES
The former President Fidel V. Ramos and wife Ming (seated, left and right) get together with the staff of the Ramos Peace and Development Foundation during the holidays. "The period between Christmas and New Year is a specially busy week for the Ramos family." FVR tells PDI because the ex-first lady's birthday falls on Dec. 29. So there's an "overflow" of well-wishers during this season.
HANDOUT PHOTO

CORY AQUINO FAMILY.
THE AQUINOS pose for their 2006 Christmas photo. Standing, from left Noynoy Aquino, Jonty Cruz, Manolo Abellada, Eldon Cruz, Jiggy Cruz, Miguel Abellada, Dodo Dee, Kiko Dee, Kris Aquino-Yap, James Yap. Sitting, from left: Ballsy Aquino-Cruz, Nina Abellada, Viel Aquino-Dee, Jia Dee, Cory Aquino, Joshua Aquino, Pinky Aquino-Abellada.
HANDOUT PHOTO



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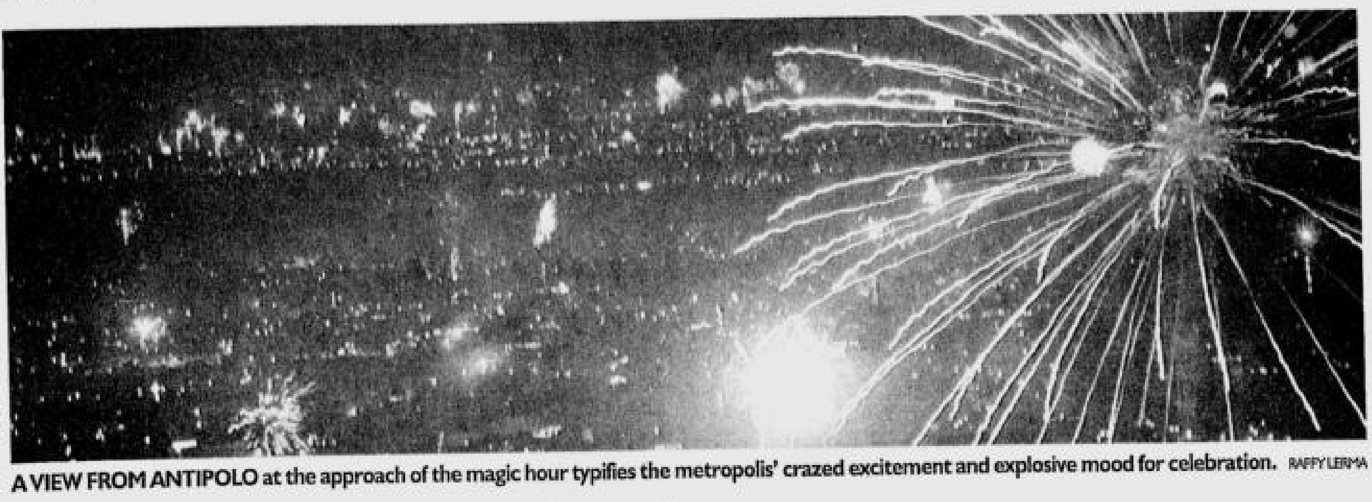

A VIEW FROM ANTIPOLO at the approach of the magic hour typifies the metropolis' crazed excitement and explosive mood for celebration. RAFFY LERMA

New Year's Day in Metro …

LIKE MOST PEOPLE AROUND the country, residents of Metro Manila welcomed the New Year in a raucous way.

- **QUEZON CITY:** In a less than auspicious start to the New Year, 70 merrymakers in Quezon City spent the first day of 2007 in hospitals after being injured by firecracker blasts, police said.

In separate tragedies, two men were killed in shooting and stabbing incidents.

One of the victims was an unidentified man found slumped on the pavement along Villongco Street, Barangay Commonwealth. He had a bullet wound in the right temple and he died as he was being taken to a hospital.

Police initially thought the man might have been hit by a stray bullet fired at the height of the celebration, but witnesses later told them the victim had been involved in a shooting incident with another person.

Two fires damaged some homes in Quezon City minutes after midnight.

Arson investigators said they suspected both fires were caused by firecrackers thrown through the windows.

- **CALOOCAN:** Three people people were killed in separate incidents in Caloocan. A total of 122 others were also injured in the northern part of the metropolis due to stray bullets and firecrackers.

Brothers Ricarte and Jojit Pascua were trying to line up firecrackers on a street in Bagong Silang when they were stabbed by two men, who escaped. Ricarte was instantly killed while his brother was seriously injured.

Juanito Bandola, 47, was inspecting an unexploded firecracker in front of his house when he was fatally stabbed in the chest.

- **MANILA:** There was a slight increase in the number of firecracker-related injuries in Manila this year.

Dr. Jose Barranda, city health officer, said there were at least 218 people injured by firecrackers. He said this was 8 percent more than number of cases reported last year.

Barranda said about 30 percent of this year's victims had eye injuries. He attributed this to the use of the *boga*, an improvised cannon.

Barranda also disclosed that there were at least two victims of stray bullets.

Dr. Frederick Ocampo, senior house officer of the Jose R. Reyes Memorial Medical Center, said the hospital treated 60 patients for firecracker-related injuries—including eight people who sustained wounds from stray bullets—between midnight and 11 a.m. yesterday.

- **EASTERN DISTRICT:** Although police had seized tens of thousands of pesos worth of powerful firecrackers days before the New Year, at least 79 people ended up being injured by firecracker blasts.

Thirty people were hurt in Mandaluyong, 19 in Marikina, 12 in San Juan and eight in Pasig. *With reports from DJ Yap, Nancy Carvajal, Tina Santos, Margaux Ortiz and Edson C. Tandoc Jr.*

… And across the nation

HERE IS HOW THE NEW YEAR arrived elsewhere in the country.

LUZON:

- Two people were killed in a New Year's eve fire in Cagayan while at least 191 people were reported hurt in firecracker-related injuries during revelries in Northern and Central Luzon.

Fires also hit a commercial district in Baliuag, Bulacan, on Monday morning, and a shoe store at the public market of Tayug, Pangasinan, on Sunday night.

At least two people in Pangasinan and Bulacan were struck by stray bullets during the celebration.

In Cagayan, Senior Supt. James Andres Melad, provincial police director, said Henry Rosete and his partner, Leonisa Malana, were killed when their house in Amulung town was gutted by a fire on Sunday night.

Melad said Rosete and Malana were sleeping when the fire, believed to have started in a pile of firecrackers that they were selling in a store in their house, broke out at 9 p.m.

In Pangasinan, at least 54 people were hurt during the revelry.

Boga victims

In Bulacan, at least 75 people were hurt from firecracker blasts and accidents from the use of the banned PVC "boga" (improvised cannon).

In Zambales, 11 people were reported hurt during the revelry. Police reported eight victims in Bataan.

Deadly fire

In Nueva Ecija, at least 16 people were reported hurt from firecracker-related incidents.

In the Cordillera, the Department of Health reported 12 cases of firecracker-related injuries.

- One person was reported killed in Paete, Laguna after a fire razed an apartment building a few minutes after midnight.

Police said the fire caused a two-hour power outage that affected Paete and the nearby towns of Pakil, Pangil and Kalayaan.

Initial police reports said fireworks triggered the fire.

VISAYAS:

- The number of victims of firecracker blasts in key cities in the Visayas dropped but health authorities noted a rise in stray bullet incidents in Cebu.

Five were injured by stray bullets in Cebu during the holiday season.

At least 126 people became victims of firecracker blasts in the Visayas.

In the case of Central Visayas, however, its 99 blast victims represented a 40 percent drop compared to cases reported in the 2005 holiday revelries, the DOH-7 said.

Stabbing and shooting

But stabbing and shooting incidents during the New Year revelry claimed the lives of six people across Negros Occidental.

In Western Visayas, the DOH reported 25 blast victims. *With reports from Villamor Visaya Jr., Yolanda Sotelo-Fuertes, Gabriel Cardinoza and Desiree Caluza, Inquirer Northern Luzon; Carmela Reyes, Anselmo Roque, Cesar Villa and Tonette Orejas, Inquirer Central Luzon; Romulo Ponte, Inquirer Southern Luzon, and Jhunnex Napallacan, Carla Gomez, Nestor Burgos Jr. and Joey A. Gabieta, Inquirer Visayas*

New Year toll: 907 …

From page A1

the period from Dec. 21 until yesterday, represented a 48-percent increase from the 610 cases reported during the same period a year ago.

Going by the large number of victims, the bitter lessons of past raucous New Year celebrations apparently hadn't sunk in for many Filipinos.

Of the total casualties, 870 were injured by firecracker blasts, 35 by stray bullets, while two went down after ingesting the highly toxic "watusi" (dancing firecrackers), the DOH said.

Mix of good and bad

On New Year's Eve alone, 624 cases were reported, a 72-percent increase from the 448 cases registered on New Year's Eve in 2005.

"We have a mix of good and bad news this year," Duque said in a press conference at the East Avenue Medical Center, one of 50 monitoring sites designated to report New Year-related injuries.

The good news, he said, was that the DOH recorded no deaths from firecrackers and stray bullets. The number of "watusi" victims fell from 10 in 2005 to two in the latest count.

Duque said the bad news was that the number of stray bullet victims rose from 19 in 2005 to 35 this year.

Curiously, the Philippine National Police recorded only 13 stray bullet injuries from Dec. 16 until yesterday.

Duque suggested there was a discrepancy between the DOH and PNP figures because most of the stray bullet victims preferred to simply seek medical help without reporting the incidents to the police.

Duque offered theories to explain the nearly 50-percent increase in the number of injuries related to the merrymaking.

Besides the improved reporting by government hospitals, he said that the influx of dollar remittances from abroad, along with a supposedly improved economy, may have spurred more Filipinos to splurge on firecrackers.

'More money to burn'

"People had more money to burn," he said. "Perhaps also more types of firecrackers, and cheaper ones at that, entered the market."

Citing a recent survey indicating that most Filipinos were hopeful in the New Year, he said they might have expressed their optimism by taking part in noisy revelries.

Thus the increase in the number of firecracker customers.

According to DOH records, 50 people either lost a finger or a hand because of firecrackers. Eye injuries numbered at least 186 with most of the cases caused by "piccolo" (36), "boga" (33) and the "five star" firecrackers (20).

Most of the amputees were victims of blasts caused by whistle bombs (11), "kwitis" (6), "five star" (4) and "crying cow" (4).

Dangerous firecrackers

In all, the following firecrackers and pyrotechnic devices caused the most number of injuries: "kwitis" (107), "piccolo" (90), "five star" (82), "boga" (64) and "pla-pla" (53).

Of the firecracker victims, 381 were bystanders and 684 were male. At least 131 victims were under the influence of alcohol.

Quite alarming for the DOH was the report that 29 percent of the victims of firecracker explosions were younger than 10 years old.

The DOH had banned firecracker use, particularly that of "piccolo," by children under 15 years old.

Crackdown on boga

Considering the increase in the number of firecracker injuries, the DOH recommended a continued crackdown on "boga."

The DOH also wanted a "total ban on all firecrackers and pyrotechnic device for residential use."

Despite repeated warnings, two policemen, one security guard and four civilians were reported to have fired their guns indiscriminately in the run-up to the New Year celebrations, preliminary reports reaching Camp Crame showed.

PNP spokesperson Chief Supt. Samuel Pagdilao said all seven had been arrested.

"The two policemen are already facing administrative and criminal charges for illegal discharge of firearms and conduct unbecoming a policeman. If found guilty, they will be dismissed from the force," Pagdilao said.

The PNP report said among the civilians injured by stray bullets were residents of Manila, Cebu, Ilocos Sur, Cavite, Pangasinan and Bacolod City.

One vehicle suffered damage from a stray bullet in Makati City.

The PNP also reported the confiscation nationwide of 499 pieces of the banned but popular "PVC *boga*." *With reports from Alcuin Papa and Edson C. Tandoc*

2006 one of deadliest for …

From page A1

of journalists."

New world record

The discrepancy in the figures of the two agencies is due to variations in criteria. In its report, RSF made a point of stating that unlike other organizations, it "includes journalists in its death count only when it is certain that their deaths are linked to their work as journalists. The organization said dozens of other cases were not included in their count because investigators have not yet determined the motives or because they were not related to the issue of press freedom.

The IFJ, on the other hand, noted that in many cases, media organizations and victims' families are still waiting for independent and credible reports about what happened.

RSF nonetheless noted that 56 media staff were kidnapped during 2006, chiefly in the Gaza Strip and Iraq, where 17 were seized, six of them killed. Thirty-two media assistants, including drivers, translators, technicians and security staff, were also killed, compared to only five in 2005.

In terms of arrests and harassment, RSF lists 871 reporters arrested in 2006 and at least 1,472 attacks or threats registered against the media around the world—a new record.

Iraq worse than Vietnam

For the fourth year running, Iraq claimed the highest number of deaths, with 39 journalists killed there against 24 in 2005, according to RSF, which said 25 media assistants had also died in Iraq in 2006. The IFJ put the Iraq toll at 68 for this year.

"Since the beginning of the war (in 2003), 139 journalists have been killed in Iraq, more than double the number of journalists killed during 20 years of war in Vietnam," the RSF report said.

"In almost 90 percent of cases, the victims have been Iraqi journalists. Investigations have been extremely rare or else never took place," the report added.

RP, Mexico vie for 2nd place

RSF said the second most dangerous place for reporters this year was Mexico, which had overtaken Colombia to become the deadliest country for the media in the Americas. The RSF said nine reporters were killed in Mexico in 2006 while trying to investigate drug traffickers or cover social violence.

In the IFJ count, however, the Philippines comes in second with 13 journalists killed this year (INQUIRER lists the same number of media murders, up from 10 killed in 2005); Mexico is third with 10 killed.

The RSF reported six deaths for the Philippines, its third most deadly country, down one in 2005.

Election-related violence

Russia also proved dangerous, with three journalists killed there, including Anna Politkovskaya, a critic of President Vladimir Putin, who was shot dead in Moscow in October.

RSF said the high number of threats and attacks against the media was partly explained by the high number of election campaigns this year, with reporters targeted in Peru, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Belarus, Uganda and Ethiopia.

RSF said the number of registered cases of censorship fell to 912 this year from 1,006 in 2005, with the situation in Nepal notably improving.

However, it added that the Internet remained tightly controlled in many countries, with 13 states branded as "enemies of the Web": Saudi Arabia, Belarus, Burma, China, North Korea, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, Uzbekistan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and Vietnam.

UN condemnation

The only positive sign came in the final days of the year, said the IFJ, when the United Nations, for the first time ever, issued a statement condemning targeting of journalists and calling for prosecution of the killers of media staff.

"This was the only bright spot in a year of unremitting gloom," said White. "For the first time the United Nations has put the focus on a deepening media crisis. It is long overdue. We want to see action against countries that allow impunity in the killing of journalists."

For the last three years the IFJ has organized a day of protest on April 8—the day in 2003 when three journalists died under US fire in Baghdad. *Reuters, AFP*

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World parties from Times Square to Mount Fuji

From page A1

ring in the new year," he said. "The spirit of the place is amazing. I feel so alive being here."

"This is the center of the universe," said Raffael Dalvise, who lives outside Venice, Italy. "There is no other place to be."

In his New Year's greeting, US President George W. Bush noted the continuing violence in Iraq.

"Last year, America continued its mission to fight and win the war on terror and promote liberty as an alternative to tyranny and despair," Bush said in the statement wishing Americans a happy new year.

"In the New Year, we will remain on the offensive against the enemies of freedom, advance the security of our country, and work toward a free and unified Iraq."

Across the globe, the countdown to the New Year was marked, in parts, with a combination of joy, tears, prayers and hopes.

In Rio de Janeiro, nearly 21,000 police officers fanned out across the Brazilian city, many patrolling impoverished slums ruled by gangs, to guarantee the safety of tourists and revelers at a huge New Year's Eve bash on the famed Copacabana beach. The show of force comes after gang attacks left 19 dead last week in Rio.

Iconic bridge

In Sydney, fireworks exploded over Harbor Bridge as a million onlookers celebrated the New Year. The display was to celebrate the iconic bridge's 75th anniversary.

Sydney police said all vantage points around the shoreline were at or near capacity as some 3,000 kilograms of fireworks exploded overhead.

Hundreds of thousands of others cheered in London as Big Ben rang in 2007. The chimes were relayed by sound systems along the River Thames and the onlookers lined its banks near the Houses of Parliament to watch a light show countdown projected onto the 135-meter London Eye Ferris wheel. The countdown was followed by a 10-minute fireworks display, "big enough and loud enough to be seen ... all over the capital," Mayor Ken Livingstone said.

In India, police arrested two suspected Islamic militants about one kilometer from the site of New Delhi's main public New Year's Eve celebrations, a report cited police as saying.

Pope Benedict XVI prayed at a New Year's Eve service at the Vatican City in Rome that 2007 would bring the world "peace, comfort, justice."

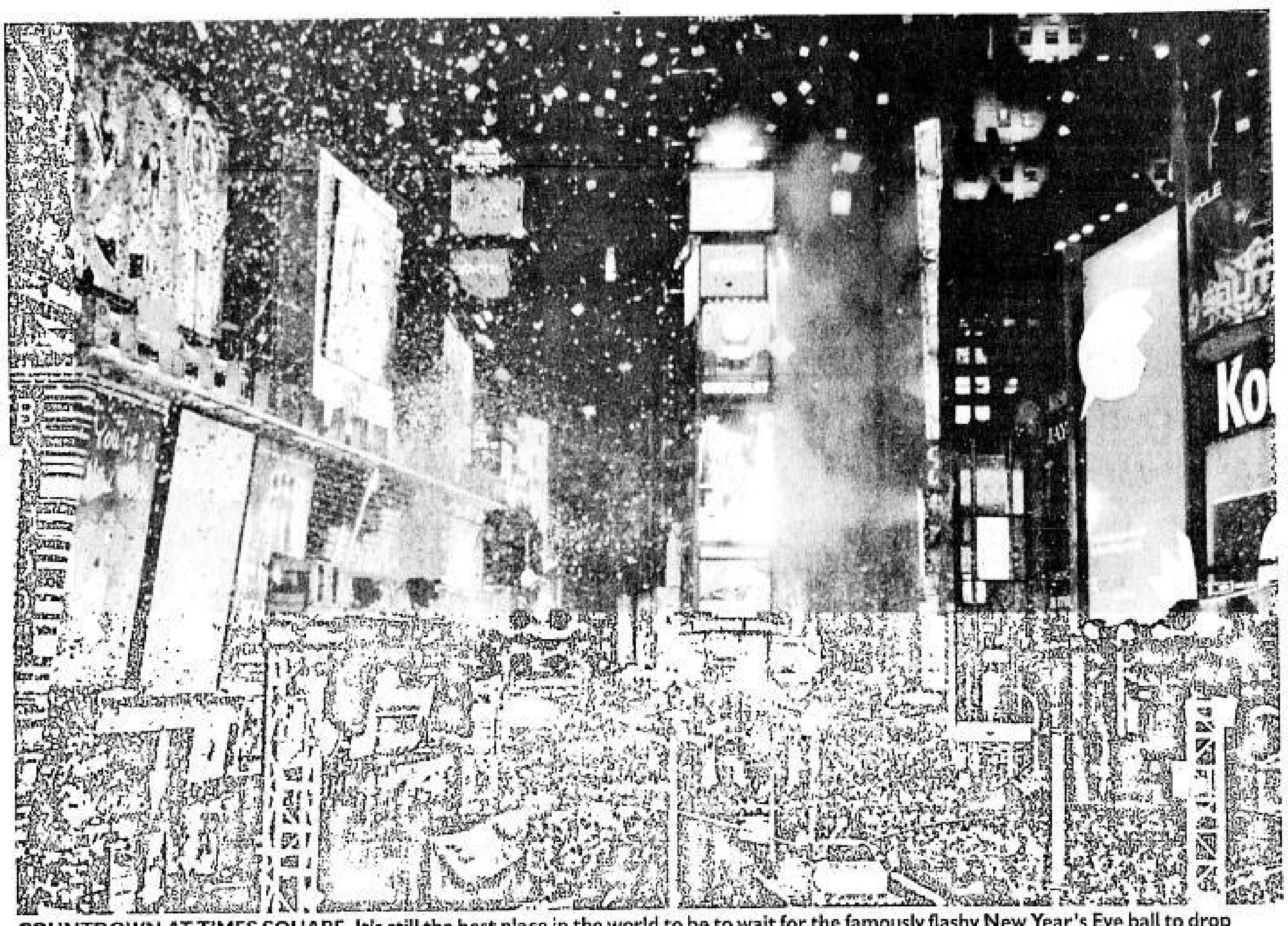
Celebrations canceled

In Thailand, city officials canceled Bangkok's main New Year's Eve celebration Sunday after a series of bombs killed three people and wounded more than 30. Thousands of revelers who had gathered at the Central World Plaza shopping mall complex for the event were sent home, officials said. But the celebration continued for hundreds of other people in Bangkok's Patpong Road red light district. (*See story on Page A20*)

Authorities in Madrid also canceled a traditional New Year fiesta in the city center as a precaution following Saturday's airport bomb blast claimed by the armed Basque separatist group ETA.

The blast injured 19 people and two Ecuadorians remain missing. If confirmed dead, they would be the first fatalities ascribed to ETA since 2003.

But the capitals of Bulgaria and Romania saw their biggest parties since the fall of communism 17 years ago as tens of thousands sang, danced and drank their way into 2007 and the European Union.



COUNTDOWN AT TIMES SQUARE. It's still the best place in the world to be to wait for the famously flashy New Year's Eve ball to drop down a flagpole to a countdown chorus to a new year led by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

AFP

'Welcome to EU'

Spectacular sound and light shows lit up Sofia and Bucharest as the two countries celebrated becoming the 26th and 27th members of the bloc, the sky exploding with fireworks in EU blue and gold at the stroke of midnight.

"Welcome to the EU," EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn told a crowd of tens of thousands at a celebration in Bucharest, where he was joined on stage by Romania's president and European foreign ministers from Germany, Denmark, Austria and Hungary. Officials were flying later Monday to Sofia for celebrations there.

But severe weather forced the cancellation of festivities in New Zealand and northern parts of Britain.

In Belfast, Northern Ireland, an outdoor concert that was to feature soul singer Beverley Knight and rock band The Thrills was called off due to the threat of gale-force winds.

Glasgow officials said high winds and rain had forced them to cancel traditional Hogmanay New Year's celebrations in the Scottish city.

In Paris, an estimated 400,000 crowded the Champs-Elysees to ring in the New Year.

Germans took advantage of mild weather, with organizers saying one million people attending festivities at the capital's Brandenburg Gate.

Year's first dawn

In Japan, thousands climbed mountains, some scaling famed Mount Fuji, to greet the first dawn of the year. Police expected crowds at the summits to reach 15,000.

Many Japanese—ranging from families with children to elderly couples—usually start climbing at night so they can reach the top in time for sunrise.

Police anticipated 95 million visitors to the country's major Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines over the first three days of the new year, as people offer prayers for peace, health and prosperity in one of the few religious rites in which most Japanese regularly take part.

In Hong Kong, 2007 brought immediate changes as midnight heralded sweeping new anti-smoking laws that technically made puffing party-goers liable to an on-the-spot-fine.

Muslim fest, too

The New Year coincides with the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha, creating the opportunity for a double celebration in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan.

But the party mood quickly dissipated for more than 1,000 Turks who had to seek hospital treatment on Sunday after their knives slipped badly as they held down struggling goats, sheep and bulls during attempts at ritual slaughter at the start of the Muslim Feast of the Sacrifice. *AP, AFP*

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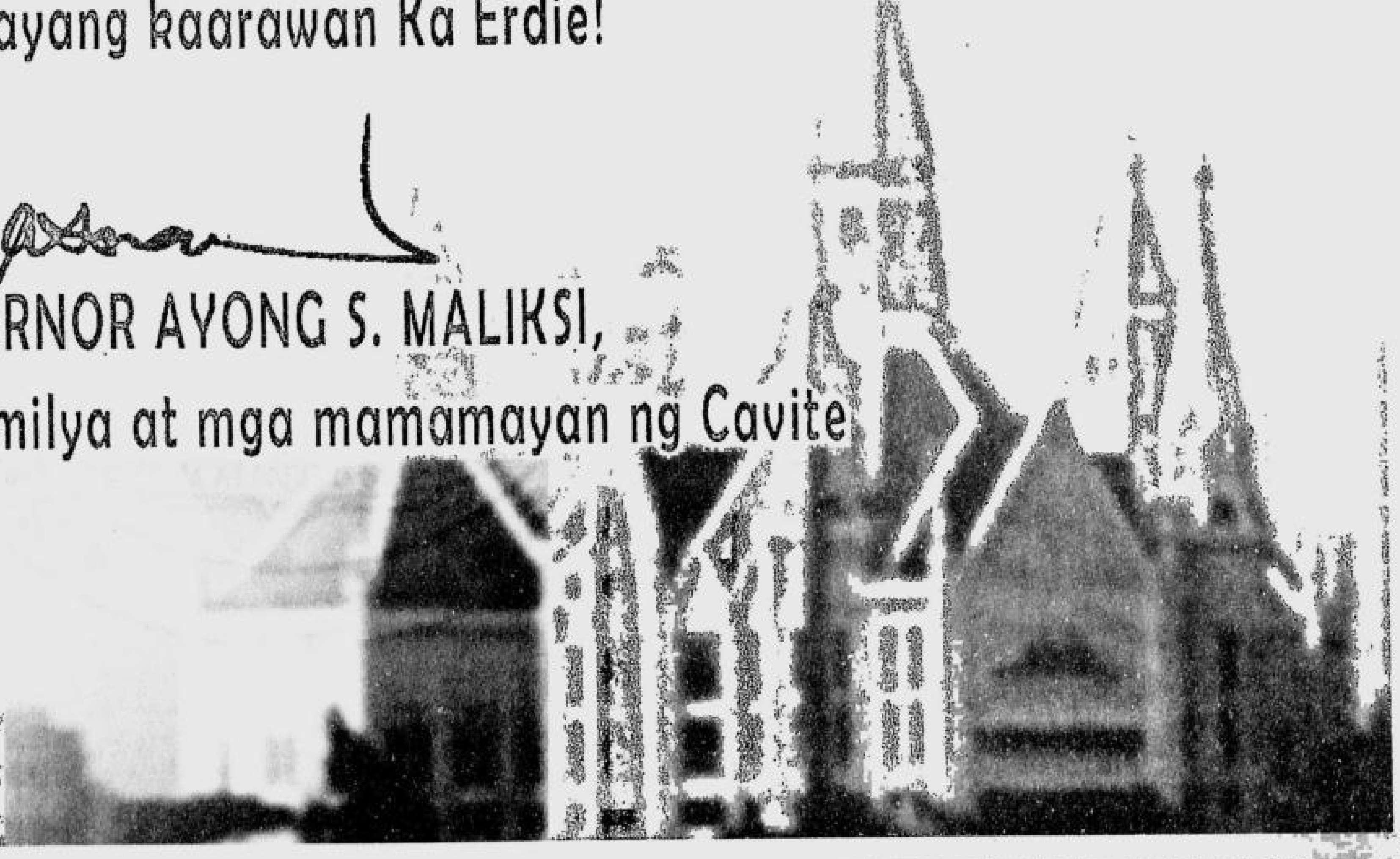

Kin cheer up Abra gov in Camp Crame

By Alcuin Papa

CONTROVERSIAL Abra Gov. Vicente Valera spends Christmas and New Year's Eve in Camp Crame where he is detained for illegal possession of firearms. REM ZAMORA

RELATIVES AND SUPPORTERS of Abra Gov. Vicente Valera, who is detained at Camp Crame for illegal possession of firearms, tried to make New Year's Eve as happy and festive as possible for him.

Anne Valera, the governor's daughter, said the governor was in "high spirits" and tried to cheer up his family and visitors.

"My father still has his sense of humor. He was the one cracking jokes and lifting up the spirits of our relatives and supporters," Anne said in an interview.

She described the family's New Year's Eve celebration at the PNP Custodial Center room where Valera is being kept as festive, with fare that included pancit, rice cakes, Chinese food, lechon and *igado*, an Ilocano dish that Anne said was a favorite of her father's.

She said the family even managed to sing some songs on a videoke machine.

Anne said the family was both "sad" and "happy" over the situation of their patriarch.

"We are sad that all this is happening. But we are happy that my father is safe and that we are with him. It was difficult [celebrating New Year's Eve in jail], but we still hope for the best. We have a lot to be thankful for," said the younger Valera.

Anne, who is a lawyer herself, said her father's lawyers were "doing everything legally possible to protect his rights."

She added that the governor had "every intention" to honor an invitation from police to shed light on the killing of Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin, a political rival of the governor who was shot to death on the grounds of the Mt. Carmel Church in Quezon City last Dec. 16.

Police said Valera was a suspect in the killing and has invited him for an interview.

Anne insisted that her father was not a suspect in the Bersamin murder, saying the police had merely issued an invitation "which he can honor at his own convenience."

"And he has every intention to honor it as soon as he can. But now he is detained here," she said.

Valera and three of his aides were stopped at Commonwealth Ave. by members of the police Traffic Management Group (TMG) very early last Friday for using a vehicle without any license plates.

Valera and his companions were brought to Camp Crame after the vehicle was inspected and found to contain seven guns and a grenade. The four were later charged with illegal possession of firearms and detained.

TMG commander Chief Supt. Errol Pan yesterday denied that his men had "planted" the evidence in Valera's car, as claimed by the governor's camp.

"That is not true. It's next to impossible to plant evidence because there is no time and media and his lawyers were right there. They are just saying that to discredit his arrest and the process of the investigation," Pan told reporters.

He also denied that his men had taken the governor's Rolex watch, jewelry and P300,000 in cash. The governor claimed that the items went missing after police took him and his men into custody.

Pan meanwhile disputed Valera's claim that the Chevrolet Suburban that he was using was new and that its license plates were still being processed by the dealer.

Pan said the TMG had received information that the vehicle was already in the country two years ago.

Pan also said the Valera camp has "refused to cooperate" in the investigation, having failed so far to submit the documents of the vehicle and of the guns found inside it.

DNA tests to establish Janjalani identity to be done in US this week

By Alcuin Papa

DNA TESTS ON samples taken from a cadaver believed to be Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) leader Khaddafy Janjalani and that of his brother Hector will be done in the United States this week, a police source said yesterday.

Test results, which may be available 30 to 45 days later, will determine whether two former ASG rebels will receive a $5-million dollar reward. The two led Philippine Marines to a site in Barangay Kabuntakas in Patikul, Sulu where the body was unearthed last Dec. 27.

The US government had offered the reward for information leading to the capture—dead or alive—of Janjalani, who is on their list of "Most Wanted Terrorists."

The two informants claimed Janjalani was fatally wounded in an encounter with government soldiers last September.

The official speaking on condition of anonymity, said PNP lab technicians are just waiting for a signal from the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to fly to the US and begin the tests.

"The testing will be done there because it is faster," the official said.

The source also said the Americans wanted to make sure the DNA tests were "done right," despite the fact that DNA testing can be done here in the country, to facilitate the turnover of the reward money.

Prison officials confirmed last Friday that members of the police and FBI managed to extract a saliva sample from Janjalani's brother Hector. DNA tests can confirm they are brothers.

Janjalani was born March 3, 1975 in Isabela City, Basilan province. He took over the reins of the ASG after his older brother Abdujarak was killed in a firefight with police in Basilan in 1998.

The Abu Sayyaf Group is notorious for the kidnapping of tourists in Sipadan and the Dos Palmas beach resort in Palawan, and is behind several recent terrorist bombings in the country. The Basilan and Sulu-based rebel group is also believed to have established links with the shadowy Indonesia-based Jemaah Islamiya and Osama Bin Laden's al Qaida terror ring.

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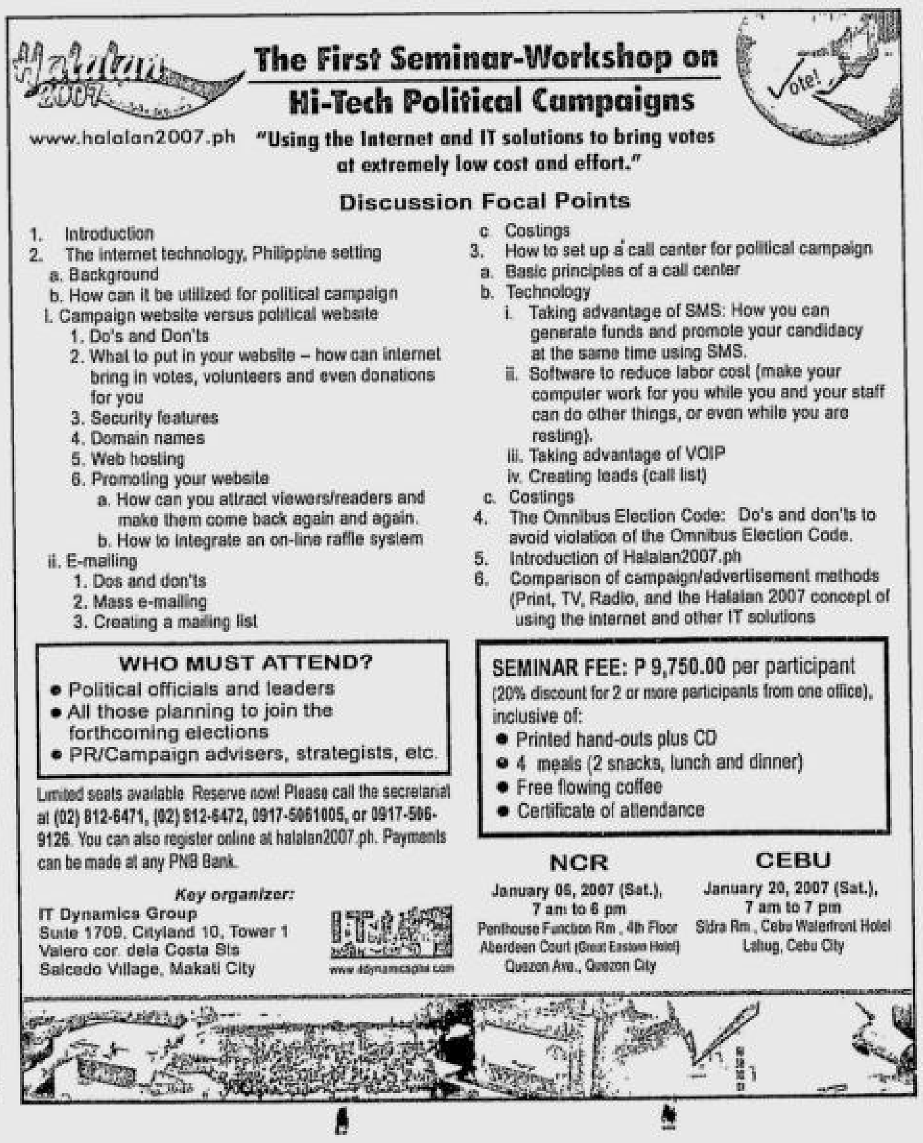

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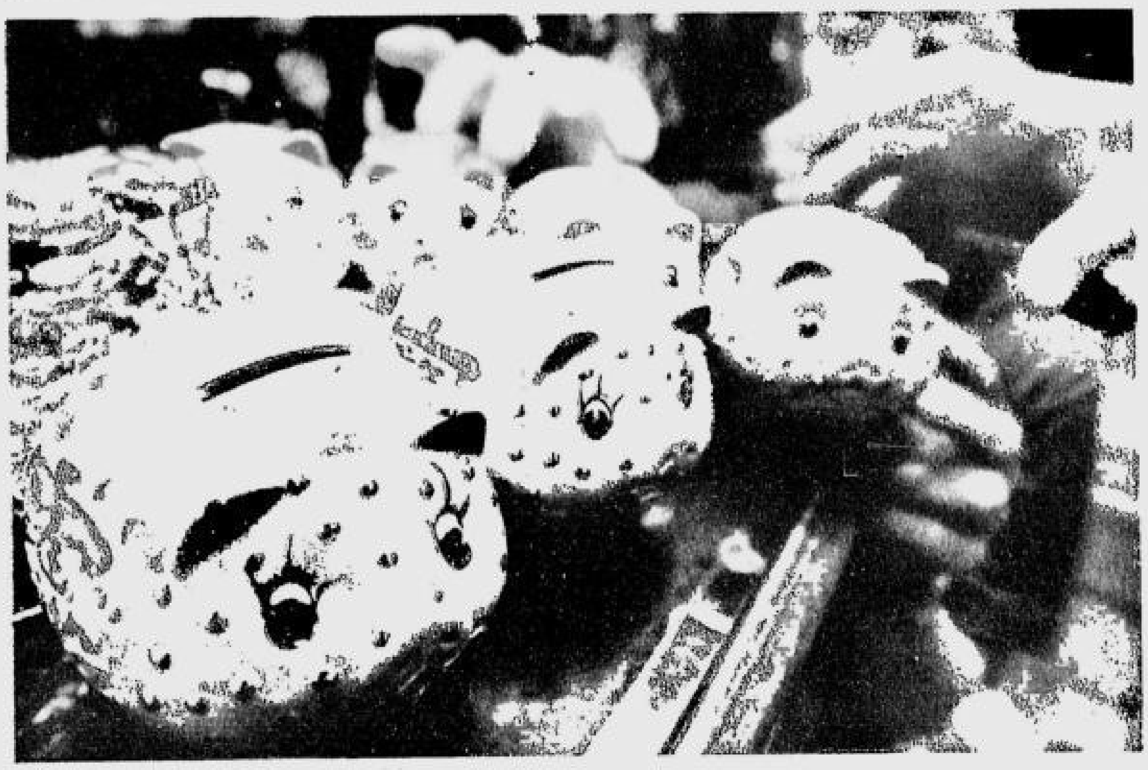

PIGGY BANKS. A vendor hopes to cash in on piggy banks sales at Manila's Chinatown Sunday. In the Chinese zoological calendar, the year 2007 is the Year of the Wild Boar or Pig. AP

DOT bats for more North

By Jerome Aning

THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM IS working to get more visitors from North America, particularly Filipino expatriates, United States and Canadian citizens of Filipino descent, and their friends, to visit the Philippines this year.

DOT's Team North America will be launching the second phase of its raffle promotion to lure tourists from the US and Canada via the agency's new web portal, www.experiencephilippines.ph.

A slogan has even been coined for the drive—"The Philippines: Explore. Experience. Return."

"This program aims to persuade Americans, Canadians and global Pinoys, particularly those who were born and raised in the US and Canada, to visit our country and experience for themselves modern-day Philippines and its diverse attractions," Tourism Secretary Joseph Ace Durano said.

"Through their personal experiences in the country, they can be our advocates and spokespersons when they go back home," Durano said.

The program's first phase, dubbed the "Great Free Flight Giveaways," ran from June 11 to Sept. 11, 2006. The first two batches of its 250 winners arrived in October 2006; the rest will be arriving until February this year.

The arrivals were given a warm welcome at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport and breakfast at a 5-star hotel.

The second phase of the drive is called the "Out-of-the-Box" promo.

For this phase, those permanent residents of North America who travel to the Philippines on vacation or business between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2007, will have the chance to win prizes ranging from a fully furnished condominium in Metro Manila to first-class airline seats.

"These product and service brands are iconic of 21st century Philippines," Durano said.

US and Canadian passport holders, of legal age.
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FIREWORKS dazzle visitors to the Enchanted Kingdom in Santa Rosa, Laguna, to usher in 2007. ERNIE U. SARMIENTO

Erap gets 9-hour pass to visit mom in Polk St. home

By Norman Bordadora

OUSTED PRESIDENT JOSEPH ESTRADA spent New Year's Day yesterday with his 102-year-old mother, other members of his family and some leaders of the United Opposition.

Estrada was given a nine-hour pass by the Sandiganbayan antigraft court to spend time with his ailing mother, Mary Ejercito, at her home on Kennedy Street in North Greenhills, San Juan.

But electric power problems at his mother's house prompted the transfer of the reunion, with the acquiescence of his police guards, to Estrada's own residence at No. 1 Polk Street, also in Greenhills.

"It was your usual New Year's Day family reunion. We were happy because we became a whole family again. We were also sad because we knew that at the end of the day, he would have to leave," said one of Estrada's sons, San Juan Mayor JV Ejercito.

And as in past furloughs from detention at his or his mother's house, the Estrada family get-together was interrupted by "political consultations" between Estrada, who is still recognized as a leader of the opposition, and several of his political allies.

"There were also consultations because of the 2007 senatorial elections fast approaching," said Ejercito, who had received his father's blessings to run for the Senate in place of Sen. Luisa Ejercito, the deposed president's wife, who will reportedly not be seeking reelection.

"It was agreed that the final lineup of the United Opposition for the senatorial elections will be announced on Jan. 15," the San Juan mayor said.

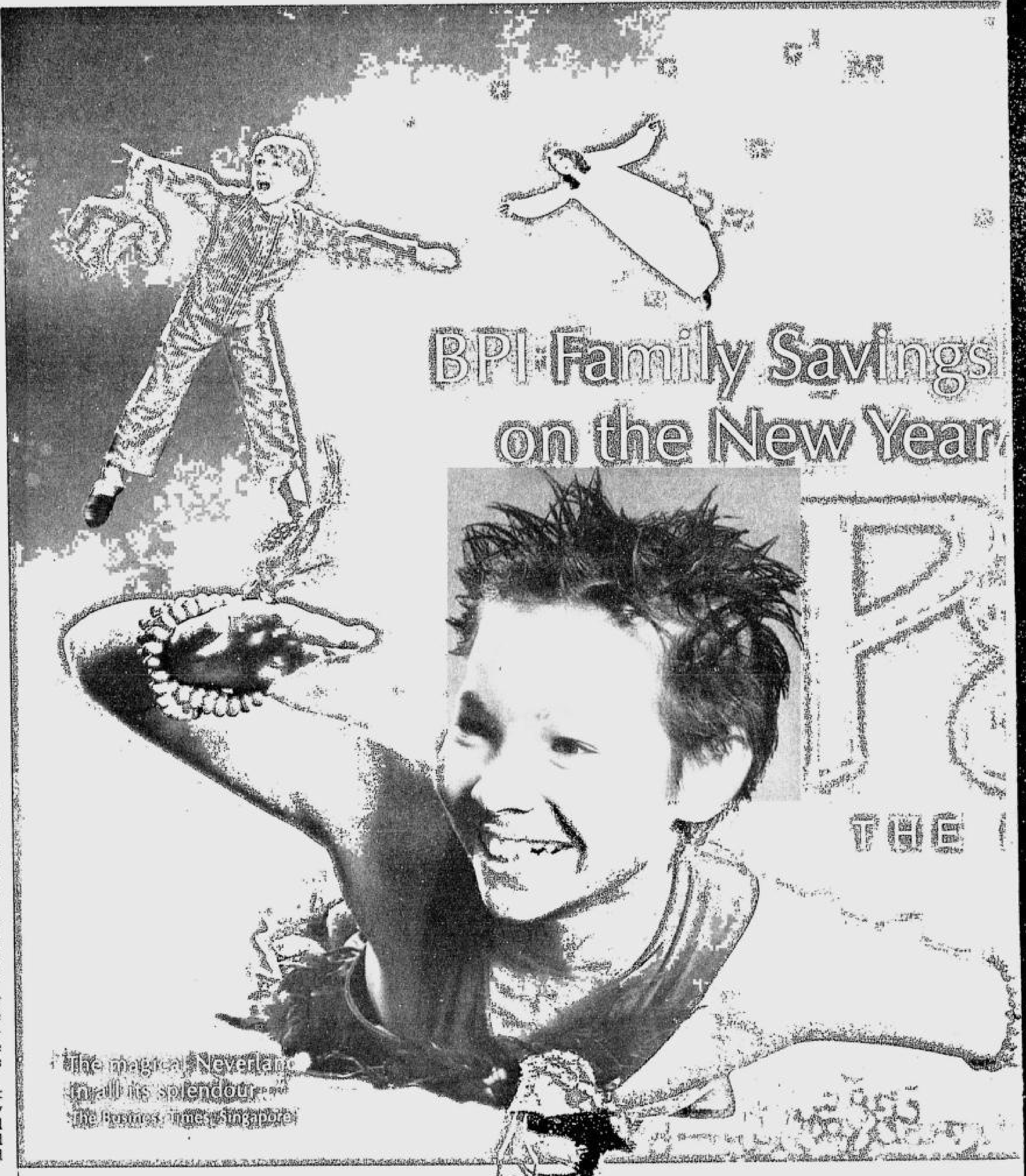
Ejercito said there were many politicians who wanted to join the opposition's senatorial lineup, "unlike the administration that seems to have no material for their senatorial team."

He said the people who came to see his father yesterday were the usual ones who would visit during his furloughs from detention.

They included Makati Mayor and former United Opposition president Jejomar Binay, former Ambassador to the United States Ernesto Maceda, former senators Francisco Tatad and Tito Sotto, and House Minority Leader Francis Escudero.

"There were no controversial figures. It was just a gathering of family and close friends," Ejercito said.

Estrada left his Greenhills home at 5 p.m. and was whisked away by helicopter back to his detention estate at Tanay, Rizal, where he awaits the judge's sentence on his recently concluded plunder and perjury trial.



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those who earlier won came rthia and had been in the US 980s. Upon arriving, many opt- their hometowns in Cebu, Nueva Ecija, Pangasinan and

g to DOT's Team North Ameri- -Jun Jorda-Apo, there are nillion Filipinos and Filipino- n the US alone.

"We have barely scratched the surface of potential travelers from that continent," Jorda-Apo said.

"There is a big slice of the North American tourist market that remains untapped. There's a lot of potential for this market to grow and to capture this market we are creating excitement over there," the tourism official said.

DOT statistics as of October showed that visitors from the US numbered 467,066 and while 60,271 Canadians came to the Philippines. The two markets grew by 8 and 10 percent, respectively, since 2005.

The top prize is a St. Francis Towers condo unit in Ortigas, Mandaluyong City. Also at stake are business-class airline tickets and domestic tour packages from PAL, a Shangri-La Mall shopping spree, PNB Money Card and Remittance packages, an Abenson furniture and appliance showcase, American Eye Care treatments and a Duty Free Philippines shopping extravaganza.

FIERY 2007. Children play with fireworks as they write the new year 2007 using a slow time exposure during New Year's Eve revelry in Manila. Filipinos celebrate the new year with noisy merry making and fireworks. AFP

100 runaway maids in Beirut need help

By Nikko Dizon

WHILE THE CLOCK TICKED TOWARD THE New Year, more than 100 Filipino domestic helpers sought refuge at the Philippine Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, awaiting their transfer to the Lebanese Emigration Detention Center where their cases will be heard.

Beginning this month, the Philippine Embassy will be turning over to the Lebanese government custody of Filipino workers who had run away from their employers for reasons that included maltreatment, molestation, nonpayment of salaries and abominable working conditions, the INQUIRER learned over the weekend from a well-placed source in Lebanon who asked not to be identified for security reasons.

The Department of Foreign Affairs confirmed the report, saying the transfer was part of the "coordination" of the Filipino workers' cases with the Lebanese emigration bureau.

"They cannot leave until the (Lebanese) government evaluates their cases, settles with their employers, processes their clearances; and [only then] would they finally be given an exit pass," acting foreign spokesperson Ed Malaya told the INQUIRER in a phone interview Sunday.

Without the "coordination," the domestic helpers might not be permitted to leave by the Lebanese government, Malaya added.

The downside is the average stay of a Filipino worker in a detention center while her case is being heard is one month. Quoting embassy figures, Malaya said there were 101 Filipino workers currently staying at the embassy. The INQUIRER source said there were 117.

This was a substantial increase in the number of Filipino domestic workers awaiting coordination proceedings following last year's war between Israel and Hezbollah, which saw thousands of Filipino domestic workers fleeing the trouble in droves.

"There's an ongoing fear and reluctance, which I think is valid, for them to go to the Emigration Detention Center," the INQUIRER source said.

Already traumatized by their experiences with their employers, the domestic helpers feared they would be subjected to harassment and intimidation at the detention center.

The Filipino workers said they would rather remain at the embassy while their cases were being heard rather than a detention center.

Each worker also had a common plea: Please get us home.

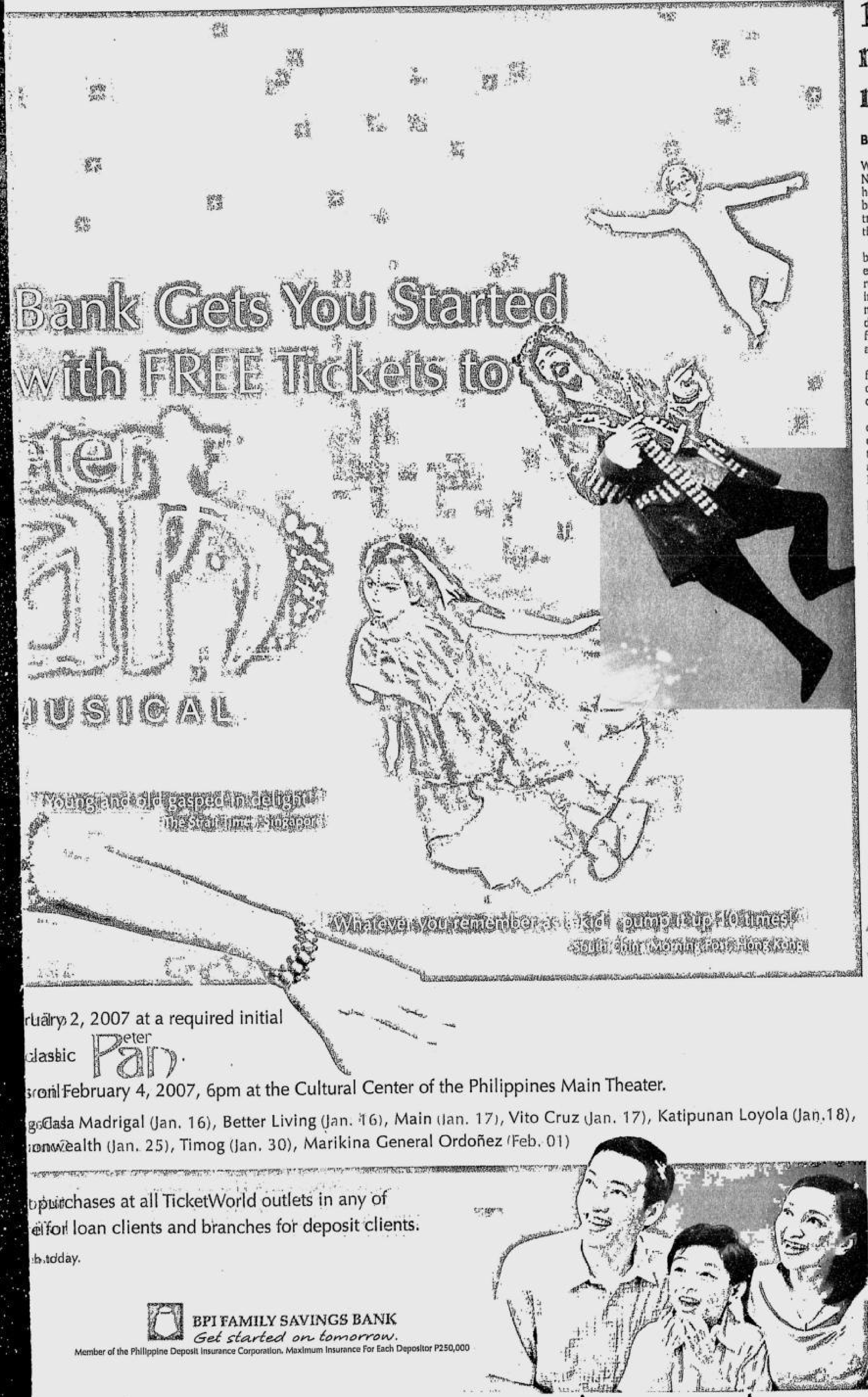
The source said that a Lebanese government regulation required that Filipino runaways be turned over to Lebanese authorities within 24 hours of arriving at the embassy.

At the detention center, the Filipino workers would be guarded by Lebanese police and could be questioned by Lebanese lawyers "without the presence of an embassy official or lawyer," the source said.

The source added that those domestic helpers whose cases were being handled by Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center, a nongovernment organization that helped migrant workers, were luckier because the group ensured that a lawyer was present during an investigation.

"But Caritas only handles hard cases like rape, unpaid salaries with maltreatment and molestation that were brought to their attention immediately, that is, within hours of [the crime] when marks are still fresh," the source said.

While the Philippines is bound to follow the Lebanese regulation, Malaya said the government assured the Filipino workers that "every case coordinated with the Lebanese emigration authorities would be given full consular attention."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OPINION

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The year ahead

EDITORIAL

THE FIRST MONTH OF THE WESTERN CALENDAR was named after Janus of Roman mythology, the god of beginnings. Janus is often depicted with two faces, so that one face looks forward while the other looks backward. And so it is that in January, we look back at the past year and review our accomplishments and failures. And we also look forward and try to predict what the year ahead has in store for us.

The past year was a terrible year with its more than usual share of natural and manmade disasters. Four strong typhoons struck the country, killing hundreds of people and destroying hundreds of millions of pesos worth of public and private property. In some cases the disasters were caused by human negligence and lack of preparedness, such as the fire in an Ormoc mall that killed 25 people.

Malacañang boasts that last year was a good year for the economy, with the peso rising to its highest in nearly six years, the stock market shooting up to a near 10-year high, inflation down to one digit, and dollar reserves zooming to $22.6 billion. But all these economic gains are apparently being enjoyed only by the upper classes, and not by the masses who continue to suffer from low income, hunger and inadequate social services.

On the political front, 2006 was a turbulent year that saw at least one supposed coup attempt and a continuing conflict between administration and opposition forces over a proposal to amend the Constitution by various means. The Supreme Court struck down what it called a deceptive people's initiative and attempts to restrict the people's rights and freedoms through the calibrated preemptive response, an executive order on a supposed state of emergency, and another order that banned executive officials from testifying at congressional hearings.

As the year ended, the Subic rape case continued to make the headlines, with the executive department riding roughshod over the judiciary and hustling convicted rapist Daniel Smith, an American Marine, out of a Philippine jail and back to the US Embassy.

More than 700 leftist militants and 49 journalists were killed. The almost weekly killings alarmed the international community, including the American Chamber of Commerce, but drew only a weak reaction from the Filipinos themselves.

The closing weeks of the year gave us a foretaste of the violence and bloodshed that lies ahead in this election year. A congressman of Abra was killed just outside a church, and the governor of the province was immediately named, but not formally charged, as the principal suspect.

The economy appears to be headed for better times, and was expected to ride on the crest of increasing remittances from overseas Filipino workers. But the OFW boom is being sustained at a terrible social cost (broken homes, neglected children, etc.) and a worsening brain drain that could result in a crisis in medical services and education.

The administration forces momentarily called a halt to the efforts to amend or revise the Constitution to put in place a unicameral, parliamentary form of government that would ensure President Macapagal-Arroyo's continuance in power, probably even beyond 2010. But emboldened by the low turnout at a prayer rally organized principally by the Catholic bishops, the administration is again gearing up for another attempt to force through a Charter change. The opposition forces will not take this sitting down, so expect more verbal and physical clashes to occur in public forums, protests and demonstrations this year.

The Arroyo administration is determined to maintain its two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives to foil any attempt to impeach the President. Expectedly, it will use all its power, and the guns, goons and gold at its disposal to preserve this majority in the coming election. It looks like the coming election will be one of the bloodiest and dirtiest in the country's history—unless the election gun ban is strictly enforced, private armies are disbanded and trouble spots are brought under the control of a neutral agency. But the scandal-ridden Commission on Elections cannot be expected to stay neutral in this year's election.

Some parts of the country seem destined to suffer the fate of Sisyphus: they will continue to build, but whatever they have built will be struck down in a matter of days, if not hours, by stronger storms and more prevalent floods.

It looks like the economy will continue to forge ahead this year but as in the past, the benefits will not seep down to the masses. This year does not look promising politically and socially. But then again, Filipinos may yet surprise themselves.

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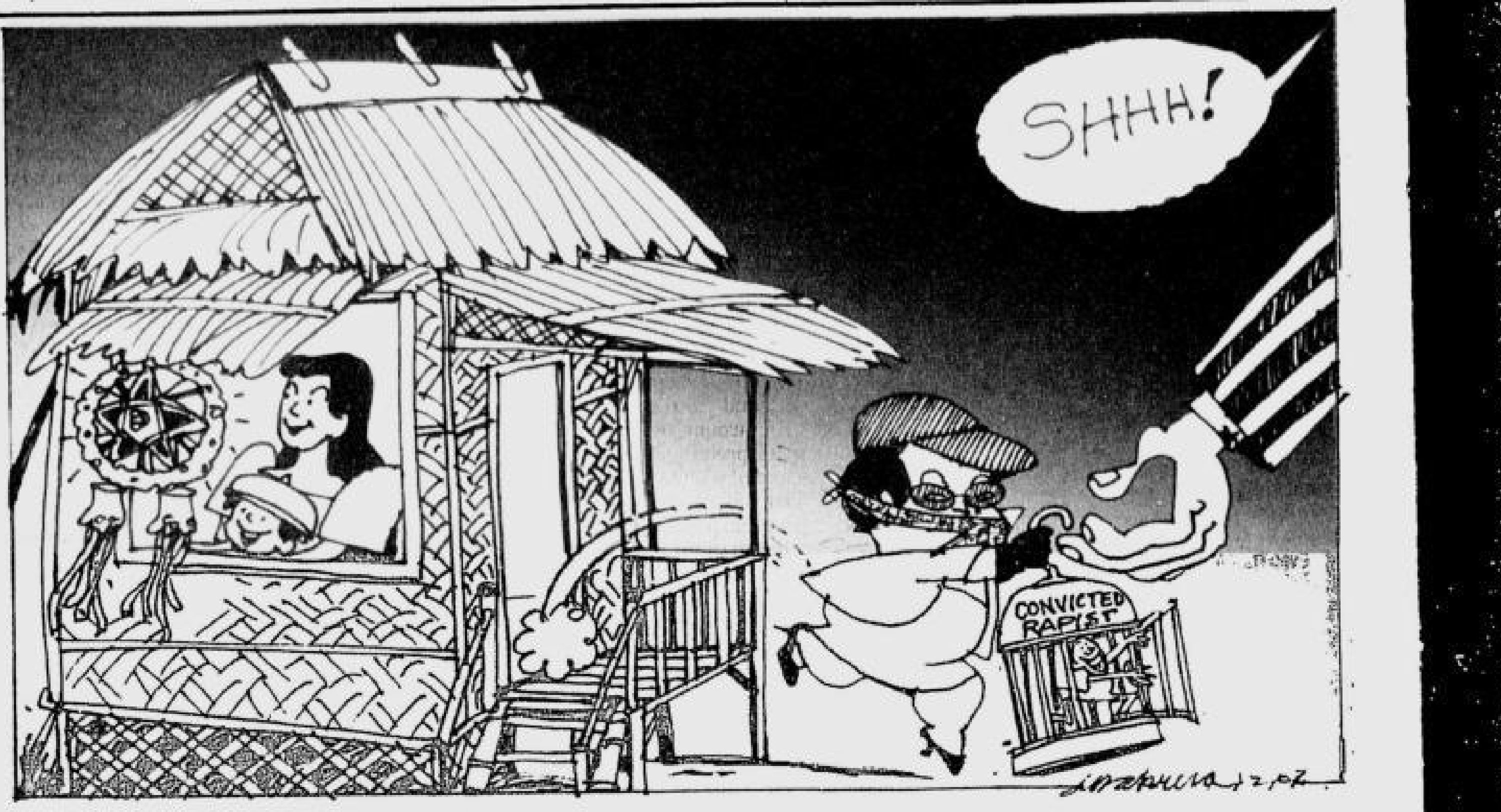

Sprigs of hope

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

"Make sure the poor have reason for hope."
—1999 Nobel Economics Laureate Armatya Sen.

NINE OUT OF TEN FILIPINOS ENTERED THE New Year with hope rather than fear, Social Weather Stations concludes from a nationwide survey. "Are we the hopeful of the hopeless?" a friend in Jerusalem e-mailed? Or is there hard-nosed basis for this rosy forecast?

Our "elites" scoff at the ordinary—and largely poor—people as "passive." It's their code word for less than bright. Yet, before 2007 started, ordinary citizens trashed the attempt by the House of Representatives—backed by President Macapagal-Arroyo—to castrate the 1987 Constitution and tighten their grip on power. Earlier, people beat down military buccaneers and political "outs" to clamp on juntas. And they stonily ignored the call from ex-president Joseph Estrada, a fragmented opposition and radical Left, to boil into the streets.

These were crossroads choices. "Passive" citizens made them without the usual massing on Edsa's well-beaten path. Was this "People Power" in a previous, forgotten format? And in 2007, will this power zero in on a tainted Commission on Elections that a spineless Ombudsman has refused to straighten out?

Discerning the future has never been one of man's special strengths. How do you factor in the unpredictable? "Crystal-balling" is about making educated guesses of what lies beyond the horizon. From today's realities, one sifts the trends likely to endure—and reshape tomorrow. "In today, tomorrow already walks."

Looking ahead is a demanding task. Many of our leaders' mind-sets extend only up to the next elections. And few have the vision that goes beyond one, let alone two or three generations. For example, flushing aquifers, contaminated by salt due to over-pumping, as in Cebu, can take two centuries or more.

Those who'd push horizons further out, do so for their grandchildren. When the future finally arrives, most will be in their graves. Nonetheless, the drill to glimpse ahead usually reaches fever pitch as a new year approaches. "If you could look into the seeds of time / And say, which will grow and which will not," Banquo tells Macbeth.

The INQUIRER'S Solita Monsod concisely summed up the positive gains posted by the economy in 2006—which gives hope. In 2007, will these gains translate beyond repaying IMF into more fully alleviating the misery of the poor? Out of every 100 Filipinos, 38 remain handcuffed to a daily income of P98. "Hope is the poor man's income," an old Danish proverb says.

But the blight resulting from skewed wealth of the moneyed oligarchies is patent. The number of Filipina mothers who die at childbirth crests at 200 for every 100,000 pregnancies, the UN Human Development Report notes. Compare that to Malaysia's 41. And chronic hunger stunts 32 percent of our children, compared to 2 percent for Singaporeans. Communication is a key to development. Fifty-four out of every 1,000 Filipinos heft a cell phone; this figure certainly looks impressive—until you realize that 109 Thais do.

Out of every 100 grade school kids here, 75 finish Grade V. But 92 in Indonesia do. The implications of a half-educated people are chilling. "All democracies live in fear of the ignorant," Harvard University's John Kenneth Gailbraith said. "There must be a knowledgeable electorate … or a surrender to the voices of ignorance …"

We have to make up for lost time. Korea started to pull ahead of us in the 1960s. Today, the Korean GDP is five times bigger than that of the Filipinos'. Over the last 25 years, Filipino incomes grew by only 2.6 percent. That's "cadaverous when compared to Thailand's eight times," says UP's Dennis Mapa. And that sound of racing footsteps comes from Vietnam, which could overtake us next.

Yet, we will stumble into 2007, as we did in 2006, without an approved national budget, warns Joker Arroyo, one of our better senators. The Senate and the House of Representatives have been unable to agree on the appropriations bill. So, future government operations will be strapped into a budget for a vanished past. "You can never plan the future by the past," the statesman Edmund Burke once said. But then Burke never saw our Congress.

"In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of," Confucius writes in the Analects. "But in a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of." And that's why the Philippines is lagging in meeting the Millennium Development Goals of reducing poverty, infant mortality and other threats.

Look at the past. Those who gave us hope were not those who occupied official positions. They were mostly ordinary men and women, self-effacing individuals in our communities, who poured themselves out for others. Some have been recognized. For marshalling private resources and government cooperation to build homes for the poor. Tony Meloto of Gawad Kalinga richly deserved the Magsaysay Award.

All of us can draw personal lists of many others who work with little notice. Some nuns, I know, scrounge for medicine, soap and food for hundreds of prisoners; write to their families, and seek scholarships for their children. A Cebuana physician ministers as a Medical Mission sister to lumads in Bukidnon. A woman-lawyer spends time giving free legal counsel to the poor. Some friends help patients and families in the leprosarium.

The list of such people is long. They give fretful people like us reason for hope. "And if you keep green boughs of hope in your heart," the old Chinese proverb says, "the singing bird will come."

(E-mail: juanlmercado@gmail.com)

Year of the pig

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

OVER THE WEEKEND I GOT FLOODED WITH text and calls from my lawyer friends offering me their services pro bono and prodigally should I need them in my "case." The reason for this was an item that appeared on page 3 of the INQUIRER on Friday. It was titled "Media groups sue Mike Arroyo over libel suits."

The third paragraph read: "The class suit argues that the libel suits have not only caused the respondents sleepless nights; they also have a chilling effect on press freedom," said the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, one of the groups that instigated the suit. Others involved are the Center for Freedom and Responsibility and the Daily Tribune, as well as 36 print journalists, including Philippine Daily Inquirer columnists Ramon Tulfo and Conrado de Quiros."

That is quite misleading, and has misled my friends into thinking I am one of the journalists the First Gentleman—a humongous insult to "first," "gentle" and "man"—has filed libel suits against. I am not, to my great dismay. I did say in a column some time ago that I felt discriminated against, being left out of the illustrious group of people who have earned the fellow's ire. There are now a whopping 43 of them, including my good friends Billy Esposo, Marites Vitug and Ellen Tordesillas.

Why they have not included me in the list, well, I understand that the First Gentleman's lawyer told a talk show on TV—friends told me about it—that in my case the things I have been saying are well within the law! I had a good laugh over that at the expense of my friends—who seemed to take a rather violent exception to the thought.

I can only thank my lawyer-friends for their gesture (and non-lawyer-friends for their expressions of sympathy and solidarity) and I beg them to stick around, I may yet have need to impose on them in the future.

For those who do not know it yet, and by way of background, over the past months Mike Arroyo has been filing libel charges against journalists for calling him various things, from being arrogant to being a crook. That has no precedent in history. I do not recall any presidential spouse—or mistress—filing a libel case against these many journalists, if at all. Well, now Arroyo's victims are fighting back. Last Friday, with the aid of lawyer Harry Roque, they filed a countersuit against Arroyo citing abuse of power.

I am, of course, all for it and have been helping out in it. I am one of the endorsers of the class suit, which was probably what caused the confusion. From where I stand though, I don't know why Arroyo shouldn't just be charged with abuse of the English language, if not of sanity. What does libel mean but that one is lying? What does to charge people with libel mean but to say that they are liars? Mike Arroyo calling other people liars? That isn't just the pot calling the kettle black, that is the vulture calling the eagle coward. Never mind if the journalists were right or wrong to call Arroyo a crook, mind only if he or his wife and their friends have any capacity to tell truth from lie.

You want to charge someone with lying, charge the person who vowed solemnly she would not run again but did. You want to charge someone with lying, charge the person who said she welcomed an impeachment trial to prove her innocence but paid off the "*tongressmen*" to kill the impeachment bids. Indeed, you want to charge someone with lying, charge that father of all liars who said he was here all the time; it was just that people, including the Foreign Affairs Department and the Singapore Immigration, who swore he had fled abroad; and that the entire opposition that was hunting him down to answer for his crime could not see where he was.

Arroyo's lawyers say he has every right to file libel charges against people who criticize him because he is not a public official, he is a private citizen. What can I say? I rest my case about their ability to tell truth from lie. No, I rest my case about their ability to tell the truth.

The easiest refutation of that is what he and his wife did at the height of the "Hello Garci" scandal in 2005. If Arroyo was just a private citizen whose existence had nothing to do with government, why did he go on "voluntary exile" after being accused of influence-peddling and receiving kickbacks from an illegal numbers racket, presumably so that his wife could "go on with her job?" If he was just a private citizen whose prodigious weight weighed little on government, why did GMA announce his departure in a major speech before businessmen, claiming she was making a terrible "sacrifice" by letting him go? That was an hour before Susan Roces was to appear at Club Filipino, and GMA's bad acting so incensed Roces she unloaded that "I looked you in the eye and saw no contrition there" tirade at her. Of course, sending the First Gentleman—that phrase really burns the tongue—to San Francisco was as much a punishment for him as forcing Dracula to drink blood, but that is another story.

The NUJP and the filers of the class suit themselves have a point when they say Arroyo's libel suits against journalists screw press freedom. By themselves, those suits already constitute a threat to it. But taken in conjunction with the unrelenting decimation of journalists in the provinces, they are an effort to scuttle that freedom entirely. Those are two sides of the same coin: The killing of critics outside of Metro Manila and the muzzling of critics inside it. It means to do to the media what EO 464 did to public officials, which is to make them see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil.

This year may be the year of the pig, but we would do very well to see that the swine do not prosper.

Special 70th birthday treat for JDV

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

LATE LAST FRIDAY NIGHT, THE DEPARTMENT OF the Interior and Local Government startled everyone by allowing the transfer of convicted Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith from the Makati City Jail to the US Embassy. My first reaction was, how come the executive department acted arbitrarily and didn't bother to wait for the decision of the Court of Appeals, to which the custody issue had been separately appealed by the US and Philippine governments. I am for US custody of Smith as clearly provided by the Visiting Forces Agreement, "until completion of all judicial proceedings," and since there was a pending appeal before the CA on it, I felt it was most impolitic for the DILG to make that move without a court order. Why couldn't the executive branch wait?

* * *

Yesterday, I called up Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez. He explained that the confusion in the public mind arises from the fact that there are two issues before the Court of Appeals.

One is the conviction of Smith by Judge Benjamin Pozon. Smith's lawyers have appealed his conviction, and both sides have been ordered to submit their comments.

But there is also the custody issue, also on appeal by the US government and which the RP government supported with a "petition in intervention." Gonzalez said the CA issued a minute resolution before Christmas wherein it merely "noted" the RP government's manifestation of support, but it did not act on it. The inference from Gonzalez is that the court's silence encouraged the executive branch to act on the custody issue, which is within its prerogative under the VFA.

* * *

The justice secretary explained that soon after Smith's conviction, an agreement on detention was signed between Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño and Ambassador Kristie Kenney. However, the judge refused to recognize Zuño as the President's "alter ego." Subsequently Gonzalez signed the agreement, but still the judge denied its validity. Finally, Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo signed it with Kenney and Solicitor-General Eduardo Nachura, then filed a manifestation for intervention with the appellate court, citing that all the conditions stipulated by Pozon had been met. To which that court only replied, "noted." A few days ago, the DILG sought DOJ's advice on what could be done on the custody issue. The DOJ sent an 8-page memo on full compliance. Obviously, that became DILG's basis for its action on Smith.

* * *

Gonzalez stressed that the custody issue was "only incidental" to the conviction appeal, and that all the troubles stemmed from Pozon's "wrong interpretation"—that all judicial proceedings ended with the conviction of Smith. He opined that the appellate court's review of the conviction could possibly take time, inasmuch as the court has to summon all records pertinent to the rape case and only afterwards would it be raffled among the various divisions of that court.

What about the custody issue? Gonzalez thinks that the US custody of Smith will be challenged before the Supreme Court. But definitely the executive department's "unilateral" and "midnight" resolution of the custody issue has given the militants a new weapon to hit the Arroyo administration. And certainly no one will believe the President didn't give Puno her go-signal.

* * *

When it returns to work this January, Congress will stir fresh interest in the fate of Charter change, which was left hanging last year with the House's proposal for a constitutional convention. But with the Senate remaining numb even to the con-con (which a majority of senators had endorsed three years ago) the fate of Cha-cha remains dim. Advocates of Cha-cha, however, are confident that—to quote the New Year message of Dr. Jose Abueva of Kalayaan College—"we have planted the seeds of reform and that with God's grace our people can harvest its fruit." I must admit that it's easy to feel depressed about how the Cha-cha campaign has come to naught, owing to the vested interests nakedly displayed in the Senate, and the reactionary tendencies of various institutions, notably the Church. But I'm consoled by a passage in Psalm 104:10, which says, "Through the mountains the waters will flow." Let's keep faith that constitutional reforms will still happen in our nation's life.

* * *

With Cha-cha hanging fire, focus has been on its most prominent proponent, Speaker Jose de Venecia, who recently celebrated his 70th birthday in New York City. His special birthday treat was to witness, on behalf of the Philippines, the United Nations' official adoption of his 2003 proposal for an inter-faith dialogue among nations—as a way to help resolve world conflicts that stem from deep religious strife. In fact, the UN went a step further and elevated JDV's proposal into a dialogue among civilizations.

A few weeks back, 110 ruling and opposition political parties from all over the world, comprising the Christian Democrats International (CDI), passed a major resolution declaring full backing for constitutional reforms in the Philippines and JDV's proposal to shift from a presidential/bicameral system to a parliamentary/unicameral form of government. The CDI parties have avidly followed JDV's passionate advocacy for charter reform. JDV is the president of CDI Asia-Pacific. Invariably he gets ribbed about how he has succeeded in advancing the cause of parliamentary governments around the world, while in his own backyard his campaign has bogged down.

JDV reminds us of the proverbial prophet who's better appreciated abroad than at home. But even if Cha-cha remains a pipe dream, this unsinkable politician's niche in RP politics is already assured through his achievements in the legislature, the effects of which are being felt in our time.

(To be continued)

Rain and tears

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

"GOD, GIVE US RAIN WHEN WE EXPECT sun./Give us music when we expect trouble./Give us tears when we expect breakfast./Give us dreams when we expect a storm./Give us a stray dog when we expect congratulations./God play with us, turn us sideways and around./Amen."

The above is a quote from Michael Leunig. It is contained in a little book, called "Spiritus," that I received some months ago but had misplaced, until I chanced upon it some moments ago, while I was searching through a pile of detritus that had accumulated in the last year.

"God give us rain," indeed. He gave us, the women of this country, rain in the form of the Subic rape case, which exposed a painful truth we have been battling for decades but which, we have found out, flourishes despite our best efforts. The harsh reality is that violence against women not only exists but also persists because many people believe it is not only right but even natural for men to hurt women. It hurts even more so because a lot of these people are other women, who still believe—despite decades of research, sociological studies, testimony and advocacy—that women who are raped, assaulted, sexually harassed or battered only have themselves to blame because of what they say, the clothes they wear, the way they behave, or even the places they visit.

Rain also came in the form of officials—especially of the Department of Justice—tasked with prosecuting the victim's case, who believe women who go public with their charges of rape are necessarily liars. There was also rain in the form of a prosecutor who believed that any expression of distrust or disgust on the part of the victim—though wholly justified, as even the judge observed—was enough to earn public scorn and condemnation for her—scorn and condemnation they weren't willing to heap on the accused.

* * *

"GIVE us tears when we expect breakfast." Despite the wildest fears of "Nicole," her lawyer, family and supporters, her rapist was found guilty and convicted after a trial fully covered by the media, and after a stream of witnesses from both defense and prosecution.

But while "Nicole" had yet to fully celebrate the court's vindication of her version of events, a version so many people doubted and even called a fabrication, there came another reason for tears.

Even though Judge Benjamin Pozon had remanded the rapist to the Makati City Jail, Philippine officials immediately got on his case, insisting that the American interpretation of a provision of the Visiting Forces Agreement was right. They petitioned Judge Pozon and the Court of Appeals to uphold US custody of Daniel Smith.

And now they have given us cause to shed tears of anger. Even before Judge Pozon or the appellate court could rule on the custody issue, government agents slipped into the Makati City Jail at midnight on a holiday weekend and, without informing "Nicole," her lawyers, or even the jail warden, sneaked out Smith and handed him to the caring arms of American authorities. In the minds of the Arroyo administration officials, such sneaky, underhanded, unlawful tactics may have been justified, but they have just put themselves, their President and indeed the entire Filipino nation to shame before the world.

I am trying to remember an example of any more brazen, shameless and treasonous behavior from other governments. But frankly, the midnight express springing of Smith from jail tops all other examples of official perfidy.

We had expected breakfast after a long, dark night of struggle, but God sent us tears instead, reasons to weep, gnash our teeth. But as another quote in "Spiritus," this time from John of the Cross, says: "If a man wishes to be sure of the road he treads on, he must close his eyes and walk in the dark."

* * *

AND so our final prayer at the start of this new year is: "Give us dreams when we expect a storm."

We are in for stormy days. We are facing an election, and the President and her co-conspirators in Congress are not yet done with their schemes to effect Charter change despite popular objections to it and the manner they want to achieve it.

Though we have weathered another year, many of the same problems remain with us: poverty, injustice, violence, shoddy governance and a malaise that has seeped into the national spirit.

We have, as the prayer goes, been played with, turned sideways and around. Our comfort zones have been violated, our normal expectations of our officials have been shattered, defiled. But still we ask for dreams, because it is precisely at this time when dreaming and believing in the possibility of good is most difficult, if not impossible.

We pray for dreams, for something to believe in, and for our own capacity to achieve these dreams and bring them within reach of the possible. Rain and tears may have darkened our world and our vision, but the start of the year is as good a time as any to join all other men and women dreaming of better times for this country, and harnessing our collective will to turn things around and begin the process of change.

* * *

"SPIRITUS" is a publication of the Institute of Spirituality in Asia (ISA), with address at 28 Acacia St., New Manila, Quezon City. The little book, with a striking white-and-orange cover, is meant, say the book's publishers, as "our way of sharing and opening up to that life-giving breath coming from a single source, the divine." The book, they say, "is not just for people who are inclined to study spirituality as an academic discipline, but also for people who are generally inspired and motivated on the one hand and those who need inspiration and motivation on the other hand."

Certainly, given recent events and the actuations of our officials, the Filipino people are among those needing inspiration and motivation.

Is dialogue with Iran and Syria worth it?

WORLD VIEW

Ammar Abdulhamid

DESPITE FREQUENT CLAIMS TO THE CONTRARY, the fundamental problem in the Middle East is not the intervention by the West. On the contrary, the real problem is that, for all their dabbling, the Western powers seem capable of neither war nor dialogue. This leaves everyone in the region at the mercy of the Middle East's oppressive regimes and proliferating terrorists.

The advocates of the Iraq war lacked an understanding of the complexities of waging an effective war of liberation and democratization on the ground. As a result, their policies merely ended up eliminating Iran's two major regional rivals: the Taliban and Saddam Hussein's regime. This presented Iran with a golden opportunity to project itself as a regional hegemon, and Iran's leaders are unlikely to let this opportunity slip away.

The advocates of dialogue with the Iranians and their Syrian allies, like former US Secretary of State James Baker, labor under the delusion that they can actually reach an understanding that can enable a graceful US exit from Iraq and help stabilize that wounded country. The delusion is based on two false assumptions: that the Iranians and the Syrians can succeed in Iraq where the United States has failed, and that the international community can afford to pay the price of ensuring their cooperation.

True, Syria and Iran are playing a major role in supporting Iraqi insurgents, and Syria is still encouraging the trafficking of jihadists and weapons across its borders with Iraq. But the idea that these activities can be halted at will is naïve.

For one thing, the interests of the Shia communities in Iraq and Iran are not the same. Iraqi Shia have never accepted Iranian dictates, and many of them took part in Saddam's war against Iran in the 1980s. After all, the Iraqi Shia are Arabs; they may [illegible] willing to coordinate their activities with their Persian counterparts, but their main goal will always be to secure an independent course as soon as possible, even while they carry on with their internecine disputes within Iraq. Iran is in no better position than the United States to convince them to resolve their differences.

President Basher al-Assad of Syria faces a similar dilemma. Although he has opened Syria's border to jihadists and has allowed Saddam's supporters to operate freely there, that choice may not be entirely his. Syria's aid to Saddam in maneuvering around the United Nations' oil-for food program brought Iraqi money to inhabitants of the border region, who have always been closer in customs, dialect, and outlook to their Iraqi neighbors than to their fellow Syrians. In the absence of government investment, the local inhabitants' loyalty went to Iraqi Baathists who helped improve their lot. Indeed, even local security apparatuses have been unwilling to comply with Assad's and his clique's dictates to seal the borders.

In these circumstances, neither Syria nor Iran seems capable of delivering anything but mayhem in Iraq. What, then, would the proposed dialogue between the United States and these states achieve other than continue to empower their corrupt yet ambitious regimes?

The story gets more complicated when one considers the UN inquiry into the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Assad wants nothing more than to see this affair forgotten—and the proponents of dialogue think that they can give him what he wants in the hope of breaking Syria's alliance with Iran.

But that is merely another erroneous (not to mention amoral) assumption. The alliance between Syria and Iran dates back more than two decades, and it was explicitly reaffirmed by the two ruling regimes as recently as January 2005. Indeed, the two regimes are now joined at the hip. Assad's recent refusal to attend a summit in Tehran with his Iranian and Iraqi counterparts was a mere tactical move designed to appeal to the proponents of dialogue.

In fact, Iran has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Syria, and annual bilateral trade tops a billion dollars. Irani's growing influence over the Syrian security apparatus is well established, and Iran is funding an effort to create Syrian Shia militias to compensate for Assad's sagging support in the army and in the minority Alawite community.

Assad cannot turn his back on all of this. No deal would be sweet enough, even if it included the return of the Golan Heights. For Assad and his supporters, survival is more important than sovereignty.

Still, to read the well-known names of commentators and policymakers who are recommending engaging Syria and/or Iran is a testament to how inconsequential the Western powers have become and how cut-off they are from the realities on the ground in the world's most turbulent region. That, it seems, is the price of their arrogance.

Project Syndicate

Ammar Abdulhamid is a Syrian author, blogger and dissident. He runs the Tharwa Foundation, an independent initiative that focuses on diversity issues in the region.

The year 2006

YOUNG BLOOD

Chris Daniel M. Loza

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—**Ed.**

EVERYONE OF US HAVE MOMENTS THAT WE CAN DO without. Moments we wish we could skip and delete, not because we regret having them but because, big picture or not, they just don't make sense. These are the moments that are so grotesquely out of place that we spend a lifetime looking back at them.

For me that moment, the time I wish I never had to go through, was 2006. Many others would share this sentiment with me, especially those from the place I come from, Bicol. For us, there's only one way to remember 2006. It starts at the end and goes back to the beginning when fireworks lighted the sky and 2006 was just a promise waiting to be broken.

December. Much of Albay is in darkness, a fitting and symbolic end to the year. The few fireworks are just a spark in the darkness that engulfs the place, the lone silver lining behind a massive amount of dark clouds. While the rest of the world offers their prayers and sympathies, how much of their charity will trickle down to the victims? A million dollars of charity or unused pork-barrel funds will find their way slowly through layers and layers of thick-skinned politicians until all that's left for the victims are a few relief goods and some measly cash that will last for a week or maybe a month at most. Once the cameras shift to the next crisis, the politicians will be there and it will be up to the victims themselves to restore what has been washed away.

You can't expect much from the members of the House of Representatives because they live in a world of their own. They don't represent their constituents; they are more interested in pushing and rushing a parliamentary form of government. They're pushing for Charter change because it's the only way they can have their pork and eat it, too. If only they would listen to the voice of the people and stop being schizophrenic, they would hear that it's not the presidential system they want abolished, it's the *trapos* in Congress that they want to do away with. How ironic that in this season when God humbly became man, they're doing everything to become gods—pork-bellied gods.

November. On the last day of November, I called home after getting a frantic text pleading with me to pray, pray, pray. Apparently, our house was flooded, its window glasses shattered, and everything wet and damaged. Some parts of the roof had been ripped off. On a clear night, my family can count the stars; on a rainy day, they get free baths.

My cousin's house became a flying house although it never got as far as Oz. My aunts stayed inside their wardrobe, hoping they would find Narnia at the other side. Mango trees, pili trees, coconut trees, bamboos and anything that once stood erect were laid low by "Reming." The dike, a few hundred meters behind our compound, broke. Everything that was not on high ground was washed away by rocks, mud and water.

When the storm abated, everything was down or gone, including electric posts, wires, refrigerators and entire living rooms—claimed either by the storm or the flood or by robbers who took what was left of your house.

We have finally become the country's most depressed—and depressing—region. Who would have thought that the tourist attraction that is the Cagsawa Ruins could be ruined again? That's like burying dead bodies with dead bodies.

There were 400, 500 or 1,000 dead (the reports vary) but the glaring truth remains that lives have been lost and maybe millions of other lives have been eternally altered. One can estimate the damage wrought by the supertyphoon in economic terms, but a father lost, a breadwinner washed away, a suddenly-orphaned girl send shock waves well into the future when all this has just become a grim memory.

September. After two months in my new job, I went back to Bicol, not to unwind but to sort things out. That same month, my only brother Bryan would have turned 18. I gathered some of his playmates and some relatives, bought a cake and some pasta, and waited for him. He never came.

July. One day before I reported for work, my mother's youngest sister stormed our house, hurling stones, wooden planks and leaves and proclaiming she had the rightful claim to all my parents' properties because she's the favorite sister and I was just a kid. I would have brought her to court, if only I wasn't in Manila and I had the funds. But four months of being unemployed, independent, and being on my own, left me with no more piggy banks to smash.

May. I was at the airport seeing my parents off. They were leaving for the United States and I was being left to deal with the eccentricities of a menopausal, middle-aged relative with the emotional quotient of a four-year-old brat.

March. My Dad was supposed to come home for good from Saudi Arabia on the 8th. He rushed home a few days earlier. I was supposed to have dinner with friends before they flew to Saudi, but instead they were with me, too stunned to say anything that could comfort me. Bryan was supposed to hear Ash Wednesday Mass, instead he was lying a few feet away from me inside a coffin. Enough said.

January. Bryan and I watched the fireworks display outside our house as 2006 ticked in. The fireworks gloriously lighted the clear midnight sky. We went back inside our house with my Mom and some relatives, took pictures, ate and laughed the night away. Tomorrow's a new day and everything's going to be all right.

They year 2006 looked promising until tragedy struck, everybody left, and one storm came after another. To say I have survived is to hide the reality that I have lost almost everything. I have grown tired of hearing that such things happen for a reason. I don't have too much faith on a strength I don't possess. Indeed, what doesn't kill you makes you cynical.

Here's looking forward to 2007, and its promises and disappointing returns.

Chris Daniel Loza, 23, works as a network security engineer at an IT company.

NOTICE TO YOUNGBLOOD CONTRIBUTORS:

Send your contributions by e-mail to youngblood@inquirer.com.ph together with your address, age and the school, course and year you're enrolled in or, if employed, the position you're holding and the company you work with. Contributions to Youngblood should not have been previously published.

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Despite rosy growth statistics, more Filipinos go to bed hungry

A 5.5 PERCENT ECONOMIC GROWTH in 2006 has sent the Arroyo government deliriously boastful. In a press statement issued by Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, the Arroyo government bragged it has pulled out some 5.5 million Filipinos from the clutches of destitution in the last five years. "The government aims to cut severe hunger by at least 400,000 families within a year and this effort is already rolling forward," he said.

But no amount of self-serving statistics released by Malacañang can change the public's perception of the true state of Philippine economy. In reality, more and more Filipinos are going to bed at night with empty stomachs.

According to the SWS, a recent survey showed that about 3.3 million households experienced hunger at least once in the past three months—a new record high. The survey also clearly showed that, from September to November of this year, hunger incidence shot up in practically every part of the country—Metro Manila, Luzon, Mindanao and the Visayas.

The inability of the majority of people to feed themselves is caused by many factors. According to Arze Glipo, convenor of Task Force Food Sovereignty (TFFS), "The problem of hunger is rooted in some issues that remain unanswered like lack of access to land, water and other productive resources." The dwindling support of the government to agricultural, rural development is also seen as a main cause of widespread hunger.

Despite its rhetoric in its commitment to pull out Filipinos from the clutches of destitution, the government has miserably failed to deliver its promises to the people.

The situation of hunger is really appalling. In the Philippines where food importation has been allowed for years now, and as cheap food flood the local markets, local farmers have gone bankrupt and domestic production has been displaced. Unable to compete with foreign producers, local farmers have abandoned their farms and migrated to the cities, thereby further swelling the ranks of the unemployed. Clearly, as a result of farm displacement, unemployment equals magnified hunger for the very people who till the land and produce food.

Under the doctrine of parens patriae, the government should defend the right of the people to have adequate access to food as a basic fundamental human right. Hunger is something that cannot be ignored. A quick response by the government is called for. Food must be brought to the table without delay. If the government can't do this, it has no right to govern.

—AYA V. JALLORINA,
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PRELUDE TO 2007 ELECTIONS: young Filipinos beating the deadline for voters' registration—a scene repeated in Comelec offices throughout the country.

Why a parliamentary system is not for us

THE INSISTENCE OF GLORIA MACApagal-Arroyo's allies in the House of Representatives on Charter change is very sickening. Their actuations clearly show to us that the parliamentary form of government is not appropriate to us. After profiting millions of pesos from the pork barrel, they now would want to perpetuate themselves in power.

I suggest that the electricity, water and telephone connections of the House be cut off so that the members of the majority will no longer be able to engage in their shenanigans. After all, it is Juan dela Cruz who is footing the bill.

—ROMEO M. PIOCOS,
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Rizal on 'borrowed' language

I HAVE TO DIASGREE WITH RETIRED Justice Isagani Cruz, specifically that part of his Dec. 30 column ("Remembering Rizal") where he said that "Filipino is a beautiful language that is easily learned without formal instruction, but it is not useful for international communication."

First of all, learning Filipino requires formal instruction, even if one is a native speaker.

In Spain and Latin America, students need formal instruction in Spanish even if they speak it at home. In Japan, Japanese students need formal instruction in Japanese. And similarly students in the United States, Australia, Canada and Britain still need formal instruction in English in order to be literate in the language.

Justice Cruz's opinion of the Filipino language is condescending. It will not advance the development of Filipino as a national language. His view places Filipino in semi-literacy. Also this attitude will not contribute to the internationalization of Filipino. If people of other nationalities want to learn our Filipino, we should have a way of teaching it through formal instruction in that language.

It is lamentable that Justice Cruz cited Jose Rizal, who tried to write his third novel in Tagalog after realizing that more Filipinos would be able to read his works. What prevented Rizal from finishing the novel is that Tagalog was not yet fully developed to express what he wanted to say. In Rizal's earlier novels, we find a similar theme.

However, I agree with Justice Cruz that we Filipinos need to improve our English competency. But that should not be at the expense of the Filipino language.

In fact, the problem of English competency should be considered separately from learning Filipino. Rizal himself warned in "El Filibusterismo" about adopting a foreign language that could lead us to lose our national identity and tighten the colonial chains that bound us.

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Time for Church to join 'opposition'

I WOULD LIKE TO REACT TO THE commentary of Denis Murphy, "If the Church moves." (PDI, 11/29/06) I agree with him that it is high time for the Church to take action and join the opposition movement. I don't mean the political opposition in Congress and the Senate. I refer to the the hundreds of lay leaders who, like Nandy Pacheco, have the sincere intention of running against the present regime of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. They need the moral authority and leadership of the Church to make the miracle work.

Many bishops and priests still believe that only the lay faithful can act in the political order and have as "the theater of their apostolate, the world in which they properly belong" (PCP II)—as if bishops and priests belong to another world (of God?).

Even some of our politicians seem to think that way. In line with that wrong notion, Sen. Panfilo Lacson recently received a sign from God when "a prominent man of the cloth" advised him—no, even decided for him—that he must run for mayor of Manila.

These so-called men of the cloth would do better to shed off their cloth if they think that this forbids them to actively and responsibly participate in the political arena. They don't have to run for office, but they should actively involve themselves with those hundreds of lay leaders who are waiting at the roadside to take action against the present regime. It is high time, indeed.

—ARNOLD VAN VUGT,
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Another flip-flop, or did she just mean to lie?

NEVER MIND THAT "GMA TALKS CHA-CHA anew." (PDI, 12/20/06) What else may one expect from an incorrigible liar?

And never mind that only 15,000 to 30,000 of the ballyhooed half a million people showed up at the Quirino Grandstand for the "thanksgiving" prayer rally last Dec. 17. That, too, was the result of an appalling "somersault." I mean, of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. Sensing snowballing public outrage over the brazen attempt by the House majority to convene Congress as a constituent assembly, it lent its voice to calls for a multi-sectoral, multi-faith and, inevitably, political rally against Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and her allies, then doused cold water on the people's anger by celebrating a non-partisan, virtually exclusive Roman Catholic Mass in thanksgiving for what GMA and her allies' succeeding pronouncements have proven to be another broken vow.

The disappointment of many resulting from this latest of GMA's turnarounds no longer matters much. What matters more is that next year's elections are now certain, at least according to the President's political adviser Gabriel Claudio. Truth to say, only a no-election scenario in 2007 can preserve the present complexion of the House, which had twice prevented GMA's impeachment. To perpetuate GMA in power—and, of course, themselves as well—through legal or illegal means, by hook or by crook, was precisely the motive behind the House majority member's Charter change adventurism.

The thing is, nobody can really guess what resides in GMA's mind, how desperate she must have become to ignore clear-cut realities; or how she must have been emboldened by the CBCP's kinder-than-expected rally. Or maybe, she simply meant to lie again.

At any rate, the nation's last remaining chance to unseat GMA—which the nation tried repeatedly but vainly in the last three years—is just around the bend: come May 2007, we can sweep her congressional allies from Congress. That need not be too difficult to achieve; given that many of them are on their third terms and, of course, given their disgraceful record in the present Congress.

—RUDY L. CORONEL,
10 Venus St., Golden Country Homes
Alangilan, Batangas City

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RARE APPEARANCE FOR WIFE'S GOV BID

Bong Pineda surfaces for May polls

AN INDICATION of how serious the fight for the governorship of Pampanga would be was the rare appearance of Rodolfo "Bong" Pineda in Porac town to thank about 7,000 leaders and supporters of Senator Lito Lapid for leaving the Lapid camp to support the campaign of his wife, Lilia. Pineda, suspected of being the country's biggest jueteng lord, warned the Lapids against raising the jueteng issue against his wife. TONETTE OREJAS/INQUIRER CENTRAL LUZON

By Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

LUBAO, Pampanga—Suspected jueteng lord Rodolfo "Bong" Pineda on Sunday drew more than 7,000 leaders from the Lapids' hometown of Porac and clinched their support for his wife's gubernatorial plan in the May 2007 elections.

Pineda's rare public appearance to support the gubernatorial plan of his wife, Board Member Lilia Pineda, was seen as an early battle signal against Sen. Manuel "Lito" Lapid and his son, reelectionist Gov. Mark Lapid.

The usually elusive Pineda went up the stage of the Lubao Gym at 5:15 p.m. Sunday to thank the Porac contingent led by Mayor Exequiel Gamboa, Vice Mayor Conradlito de la Cruz and eight councilors.

Pineda bared details on why he withdrew support for the Lapids and agreed to back up politicians who want a change of leadership at the provincial government.

He related his "frustrations" over the alleged failure of Governor Lapid to deliver on his promise to raise quarry revenues, the "arrogance" of the Lapids to take last-term mayors in the slate for board members of the Lakas-CMD, and, quoting his wife's assessment, the suffering of Kapampangans under the young Lapid's "poor leadership."

"*Ali ku mag-interes keng posisyon keng laban a iti* (In this fight, I am not interested in gaining any position)," Pineda told the crowd toward the end of his 20-minute speech.

"It's up to you to select the leaders of Pampanga. But please choose the good ones. Surely, I would vote for a good person," he said.

In an exclusive interview, the first that he granted the INQUIRER, Pineda said Senator Lapid could not convince him or his wife to change plans.

LILIA Pineda, Bong Pineda's wife, appears deadset in her intention to run for governor of Pampanga, complaining of poor leadership under incumbent governor, actor Mark Lapid, son of Sen. Lito Lapid. TONETTE OREJAS/INQUIRER CENTRAL LUZON

"Wala na siyang magagawa. Pumunta na siya sa Presidente. (There's nothing more that he could do. He better go to President Macapagal-Arroyo)," he said.

Pineda said he was irked when the senator ignored him when they met in a golf course in the United States recently. He said Lapid snubbed him even while the senator's allies offered a proposal for a dialogue.

Asked how much money he would possibly spend on the campaign of his wife and her allies, Pineda said: "Dito, botong totoo lang. Hindi kailangang gastusan (Here, all you need are genuine votes. You don't need to spend much)."

"If you ask me I don't want Baby (Lilia) to run. She could still help poor people even when she doesn't have any public office," he said.

In the interview, he aired a warning to the Lapids should they raise the jueteng issue against his wife.

"Sasagutin ko. Sasabihin ko ang lahat (I will answer these issues. I will tell all)," he said. He, however, declined to elaborate.

At the program, Gamboa raised Board Member Pineda's hands after he called all town officials to the stage. He described their appearance as "wholesale defection."

"I just followed the wishes of my people to find a good leader who will really serve them," Gamboa said.

Pio barangay captain Eduardo de la Cruz said he and 28 other village chiefs would put up a "united Porac" for Board Member Pineda.

When she spoke, Board Member Pineda raised the controversy in quarry taxes that are largely derived from sand-rich Porac.

"There are no passbooks, no receipts," she said of the collection system.

"You should be the luckiest town in Pampanga in the event the leaders are changed," she said, referring to the prospect of increased revenues.

Quoting Ms Arroyo's half-sister, former Pampanga Vice Gov. Cielo Macapagal-Salgado, Board Member Pineda told the audience: "It is not enough that we choose movie actors and good-looking men in public office. What we need are public servants."

On the other hand, she projected herself as a "mother who will make sacrifices to improve the situation of her children."

She has not yet announced under what party she would run or if she would join the Kabalikat ng Mamamayang Pilipino (Kampi) faction of the Pampanga Mayors League that broke ties with the Lapids in November.

No announcement has been made on who her running mate would be or who would comprise the local Kampi slate.

The Lapids on Sunday preferred not to comment on the moves of the Pinedas or answer the allegations hurled at them.

INQUIRER sources said the senator met with "Malacañang operators" in Subic last week to help him deal with the Pinedas.

Fidel Arcenas, provincial administrator and the governor's campaign manager, said the young Lapid has been a "very effective leader."

Army says top Mindoro NPA leader surrenders

LUCENA CITY—A SUSPECTED RANKING official of the communist New People's Army rebels in the island of Mindoro was forced to surrender to government forces after a successful entrapment operation Friday, according to the spokesman of the military's Southern Luzon Command based here in Camp Nakar.

Lt. Colonel Roderick Parayno, identified the rebel as a certain Pablo Salik, alleged deputy secretary of the Communist Party of the Philippines-Islacom Mindoro and also the secretary of the NPA's Kilusan Larangang Gerilya 2 operating on the island.

Parayno said government troopers, led by Col. Mario Chan from the Army's 204th Infantry Battalion, initiated the entrapment operations against Salik when a concerned civilian tipped soldiers about his presence in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro.

"He was forced to surrender at the bishop's residence," Parayno said.

Salik was immediately airlifted to the headquarters of the Army's 2nd Infantry Division in Tanay, Rizal for tactical interrogation.

In a related report, government forces belonging to the Army's 74th Infantry Battalion while on combat patrol cornered at least 15 suspected fully armed rebels in the village of Mabini, Mulanay town in Quezon province Thursday.

Reports said the troopers under Bravo Company from the 74th Infantry Batalion led by one SSgt. Dandin encountered the communist guerrillas while conducting a meeting with civilians in the area.

A gunfight ensued between the government forces and the rebels. The battle lasted for 30 minutes, after which the rebels escaped to different directions, report said.

"The civilians were utilized by the NPAs as shields so that they can escape," Parayno said.

The soldiers recovered a digital camera, cassette recorder, jungle packs and communist documents.

Reports said bloodstains were seen at the rebels' position indicating that communist guerrillas suffered casualties.

In another report, Solcom said a bag containing explosive materials was recovered by the military in the village of Putol, Tuy, Batangas on Tuesday. *Delfin T. Mallari Jr. Inquirer Southern Luzon*

1 week of rains kills 4, displaces thousands in Northern, East Samar

By Joey A. Gabieta
Inquirer Visayas

TACLOBAN CITY—CONTINUING RAINS IN Northern and Eastern Samar led to the deaths of four people and one town going under water.

At least 6,000 families have been displaced.

Northern Samar Gov. Raul Daza, chair of the Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council, said a resident of Barangay Nenita in Mondragon town, the hardest hit by the flooding, drowned while trying to escape from the rampaging waters.

Rey Gozon, administrative officer of the Office of Civil Defense in Eastern Visayas, said there were two fatalities and one missing in Pambujan town while another person was reported dead in San Roque town.

The flooding, spawned by the incessant rain, forced the evacuation of residents in seven Northern Samar towns.

For the past three days, the province experienced heavy rains, which resulted in three of its major rivers (Catarman River in Catarman, Bunko River in Mondragon and Bantayan River in San Roque) overflowing.

The entire town of Jipapad in Eastern Samar was completely submerged in floodwaters yesterday after two of its main rivers overflowed after a week of continuous rain.

Floodwaters went as deep as 15 feet in some parts of the town after the Oras and Dinuwangan rivers overflowed, according to Mayor Noel Ram Montallana.

"The entire town (is) flooded," Montallana, reached on his mobile phone, told the INQUIRER yesterday.

The mayor said that all of his town's 8,000 residents, living in 13 barangays, were displaced by the flooding, the worst to hit the upstream town in years.

Among the residents displaced by the flood was Eastern Samar Vice Gov. Fulgencio Fajanustan Sr., a native of Jipapad.

The town is about 122 km from the provincial capital town of Borongan.

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Taos pusong pagbati mula
sa buong pamilya ng **DILG** sa
pamumuno ni
Kalihim Ronaldo V. Puno

Garci to be tried by CPP's 'people's court'

GARCILLANO JIM GUIAO PUNZALAN

LUCENA CITY—THE CONTROVERSIAL former election commissioner Virgilio "Garci" Garcillano may have received a favorable ruling from the Department of Justice but he still has to face the so-called "people's court" of the communist New People's Army.

Communist Party of the Philippines spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal announced that the rebel movement was considering filing charges before the "people's court" against Garcillano.

Rosal said the CPP was going to try Garcillano "knowing fully well the outstanding nature of the case and the people's widespread demand to punish the masterminds of the Arroyo regime's biggest crimes against the Filipino people, including the rigging of the 2004 elections."

The CPP official said that if the proceedings on the Garcillano case were to be carried out, a special people's court would have to be constituted by the revolutionary movement.

"Garcillano himself would be compelled to appear before such proceedings. Otherwise he would have to be tried in absentia," Rosal explained.

He denounced the DOJ absolution of all 21 counts of the perjury and falsification charges against Garcillano.

Rosal said the frustrated parties at the Arroyo administration's whitewashing of the criminal cases against the former election official had already filed before the revolutionary people's courts information about the supposed crimes.

Over the weekend, the DOJ dismissed all charges of perjury and falsification of legal documents filed against Garcillano by several legislators.

The charges were based on passports he submitted to a congressional inquiry on the so-called "Hello, Garci" tapes as supposed proof that he did not travel anywhere outside the country since the time he disappeared from the public after the controversy broke into the open in June last year.

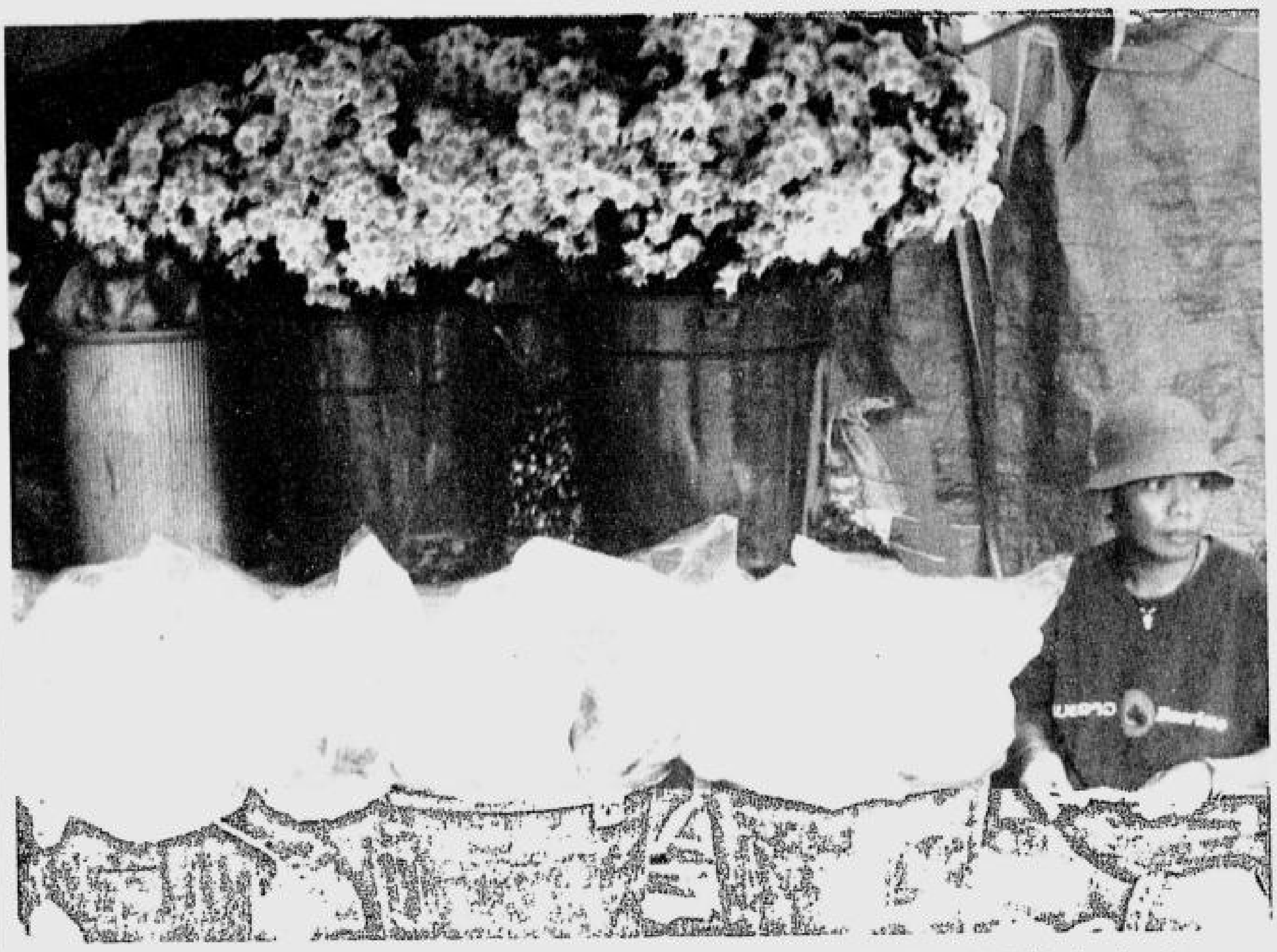
Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño said Garcillano was not yet off the hook in the alleged cheating that took place in the May 2004 elections.

Zuño clarified that the cases against the controversial election official that had been dismissed did not include his alleged role in the reported massive cheating in the 2004 presidential elections.

Garcillano was accused of allegedly masterminding the tampering of the results of the May 2004 presidential election to favor the reelection bid of Ms Arroyo.

The "Hello Garci" scandal, which featured incriminating telephone conversations between the poll official and someone sounding like President Macapagal Arroyo, led to a failed impeachment attempt against the country's chief executive.

Garcillano is planning to run for congressman in the first district of Bukidnon in the May 2007 elections and has been reported to have the backing of Malacañang. *Delfin T. Mallari Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon*



FIRECRACKERS are on display at the Jaro Plaza just hours before millions celebrated New Year's Day. Stalls like these have been prone to fires as in Cabanatuan City that started a fire in the city's public market. HAZEL VILLA/INQUIRER VISAYAS

Fire hours before New Year damages Ecija public market

FIRECRACKERS are on display at the Jaro Plaza just hours before millions celebrated New Year's Day. Stalls like these have been prone to fires as in Cabanatuan City that started a fire in the city's public market. HAZEL VILLA/INQUIRER VISAYAS

CABANATUAN CITY—A fire that authorities said was caused by exploding firecrackers destroyed portions of the public market here on Saturday night.

Police said a bakery and sections of a drugstore were also destroyed when the fire spread to a building across the market. Three vehicles—a jeep and two tricycles—were also burned.

No one, however, was reported hurt in the fire that started at 9 p.m. and was put out at about 11 p.m.

Senior Insp. Cesar Balane, chief of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) here, blamed the vendors' disregard for rules and regulations on the selling of firecrackers and pyrotechnic products for the fire.

He could not say how many stalls were destroyed.

Police have offered two theories on the cause of the fire.

In a radio interview, Balane said a wayward *kuwitis* (skyrocket) tested by either a vendor or a buyer landed on a pile of firecrackers and caused the explosion.

Police said vendors selling firecrackers, pyrotechnic and other products had crowded the sidewalk and portions of the streets around the city market.

Balane said the vendors disregarded the call of police and BFP officials to confine the selling of their products in a designated area.

"They were operating without a permit. They suddenly proliferated around the market," he said.

Balane said the two fire trucks posted near the market had a difficult time reaching the spot where the fire started because of people running and blocking the street.

The market compound's steel gates were also locked at the time of the fire as stall owners had ended their business hours.

The incident came on the heels of a fire that razed a mall in Ormoc City on Christmas Day. Exploding firecrackers reportedly caused that fire, which killed 25 people.

In Bulacan, the police seized more than P200,000 worth of banned firecrackers in Bocaue, Plaridel and Sta. Maria towns.

Supt. Jesus Gatchalian, acting Bulacan police director, said among the products confiscated were *pla-pla* and items without labels.

In Baguio City, police officials on Sunday destroyed at least 25 PVC cannons or *boga* and firecrackers and pyrotechnic products that lawmen seized earlier.

Chief Supt. Raul Gonzales, Cordillera police director, and Senior Supt. Moises Guevarra, city police director, used mallets and picks to destroy the PVC cannons and placed the firecrackers in drums of water.

Gonzales said the items, worth P200,000, were confiscated from vendors who peddled these in unauthorized areas in the city. *Anselmo Roque, Tonette Orejas and Carmela Reyes, Inquirer Central Luzon, and Frank Cimatu, Inquirer Northern Luzon*

3 rogue cops killed in Cabuyao gunfight

CABUYAO, LAGUNA—THREE erring policemen, including two rookie cops, were killed in an encounter with their fellow lawmen in Barangay Banlic here on Friday afternoon.

Police identified the casualties as PO2 Michael Aguado, assigned at the Cavinti, Laguna, police office; PO1 Sigmund Allan Jael of the Quezon Provincial Police Office; and PO1 Roland Patag, assigned at the base police of Camp Vicente Lim in Calamba City.

Supt. James Brillantes, chief of the regional special operations group (RSOG) of the Calabarzon police, said one of their civilian agents, Ryan Bernardo, was wounded in the gunfight and was now being treated at a local hospital.

Brillantes said the clash occurred as a result of an entrapment operation they set up to collar the three who had been introducing themselves as RSOG operatives to extort money from several businessmen in Laguna.

"These were rogue cops who had been using the name of our office to harass and extort money from their victims," Brillantes told the INQUIRER.

He said that a few days ago, a businessman came to his office and sought his assistance after three supposed RSOG members had asked P150,000 in protection money.

Upon verification, Brillantes said they were to confirm that three were using other policemen's names in their illicit activities.

He said they then immediately set up the entrapment operation to clear the name of his office with the help of the complainant.

At around 3:15 p.m. on Friday, the erring police officers showed up in front of the Andok's grilled chicken stall to receive the money from their victim.

Sensing that there were policemen around, Brillantes said Patag shot at the RSOG personnel and tried to escape on board a motorcycle.

But he was hit during the gunfight and eventually subdued by other police officers and died on the spot.

Jael likewise died instantaneously while Aguado died while being rushed to a nearby hospital.

Recovered from the suspects were a mini Uzi machine gun, a caliber-9 mm pistol and a .45-caliber pistol.

Brillantes said they were still investigating if there were other policemen who were also involved with the activities of the slain lawmen.

In another successful operation, police killed the alleged leader of a notorious robbery group preying on gasoline stations in Laguna province. One of his alleged henchmen were killed while another was arrested in a gunfight with policemen in Biñan, Laguna, on Thursday night, police said Friday.

Chief Supt. Nicasio Radovan, Calabarzon police chief, identified the slain suspects as Jerome Sario and Ryan Capadocia, both residents of Barangay dela Paz, Biñan.

Suspected gang member Ernesto Sollestre Jr. was arrested in a follow-up operation while another cohort, a certain Boy Tenok, was able to elude arrest.

Radovan said Sario was the alleged leader of the Soro-soro robbery group which victimized dozens of gas stations in Cavite and Laguna in the last few years. *Marlon Ramos, Inquirer Southern Luzon*

There's no stopping importation, Benguet farmers told

LA TRINIDAD, BENGUET—CONVINCING farmers to accept the reality of vegetable importation appears likely to be on top of the development agenda of the province's vegetable industry next year.

Based on issues that bore impact on the industry in 2006, the most that aroused the interest of the province's more than 200,000 farmers was the entry of foreign vegetables.

Organic farming, contract growing with multinational companies and the use of greenhouses and the cold chain system were the other issues.

The farmers, led by the Benguet Farmers Federation Inc., had demanded that the government review the economic consequences of the bilateral pacts that it signed with other countries advocating free trade.

This development put local and agriculture officials in a difficult position of convincing the farmers that the country's import liberalization policy had left the local vegetable industry no option but to welcome imported harvests.

This reality gave local officials the task of challenging farmers to become globally competitive and abandon the importation issue.

"Let us not give false hopes to our farmers that importation can be stopped," said Board Member Liso Agpas in a recent board session.

"We should stop telling our farmers that we can stop importation and instead brace ourselves for the reality that sooner or later, foreign crops will come," he said.

Board Member Sario Copas said efforts must be refocused to other concerns other than importation.

"We should focus instead on more doable and practical matters for our farmers since we could not stop importation," he said.

Benguet State University, the Cordillera's center of agriculture studies, research and extension, has not issued an official statement on the importation issue.

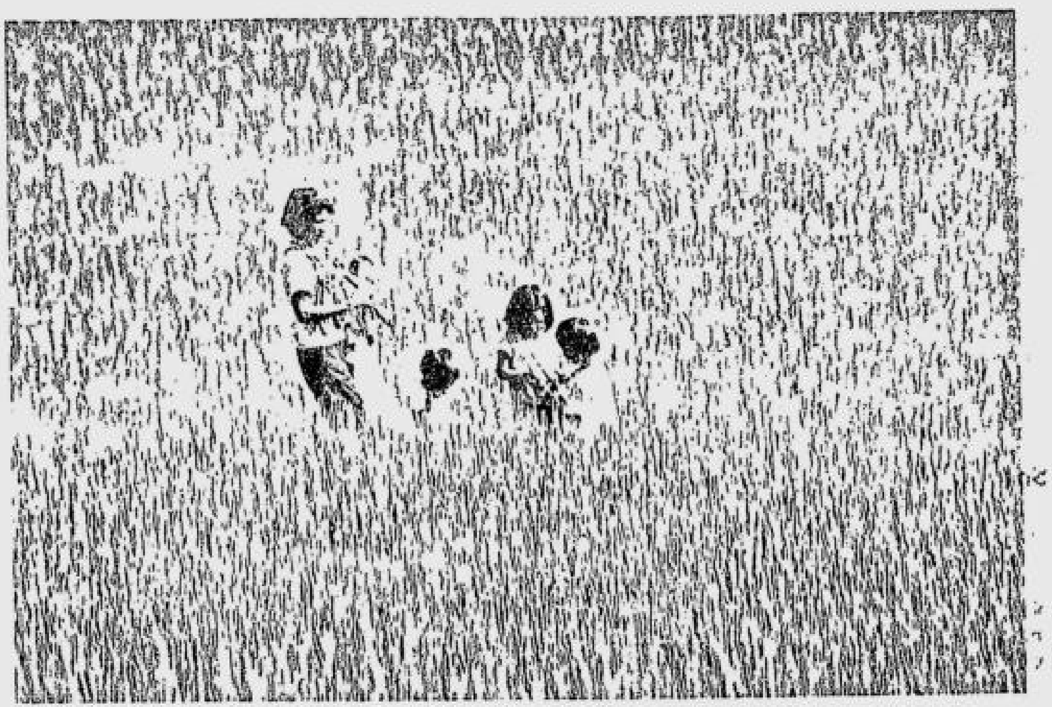
But its advocacy of organic farming has become a subtle way of telling farmers to make their products competitive against imported vegetables.

Dr. Asuncion Nagpala, one of BSU's plant disease and pest experts, said she agreed with the provincial board's view that policies on the vegetable industry must shift from stopping importation to adopting strategies that would prepare farmers for imported crops.

"It is high time that we process our own vegetables into finished products and improve our packaging and marketing systems," she said.

Jocelyn Perez, another BSU plant disease expert, said farmers must learn how to compete with foreign vegetables by looking at other alternatives to maintain the demand for local products.

Globalization is already a trend, she said, and therefore, farmers must go beyond the routine of raising vegetables and bringing them to the trading post. *Delmar Cariño, Inquirer Northern Luzon*



WHETHER because of vegetables grown on the side or the province's vast palay farms, Kalinga never really starves, and this is what has drawn government to upgrade its rice growing potential aside from its existing vegetable industry. EV ESPIRITU/INQUIRER NORTHERN LUZON

GI case custody row adds to GMA woes in '07

Bilibid 'Starbucks' offers coffee, bread, livelihood

From page A1

A coffee shop and bakery located inside the prison compound will also soon add a variety of cakes at affordable prices to its product list.

The QS Coffee and Bakeshop, which inmates refer to as their own "Starbucks," was built by the Lamb of God Foundation, a nonprofit organization founded by convicted child rapist and former congressman Romeo Jalosjos. It is staffed entirely by inmates.

"The shop is here to provide the thousands of inmates with fresh and good quality bread at very cheap prices," said its supervisor, Julius Victor Medalla, who was convicted in 2002 for the killing of Dennis Ventura, a member of the Sigma Rho Fraternity, on the University of the Philippines Diliman campus 12 years ago.

As early as 5:30 a.m. every day, shelves of "fresh-from-the-oven" *pandesal*, hot dog and hamburger buns, *pan de coco*, cheese and squash breads are already available for early risers needing a quick caffeine fix, said Medalla.

He said inmates, whose P35 daily food allowance does not allow for such indulgences, need not wait anymore for their families to bring them rations of sweets and fresh bread.

These are now very much affordable from the bakery at an average of P2 to P3 each. The shop even sells its own line of ice cream.

'Good enough' cakes

According to Medalla, the line-up of bakery products will be further expanded with the opening of a baking school early this year, to train inmates to whip up cakes "good enough" to serve at birthdays, weddings and other special celebrations that are held inside the prison.

"The purpose of the classes is mainly to teach inmates basic bread-making techniques so they will have new skills that they can use when they get out of prison," he explained.

While many inmates have already expressed interest in taking the course, the Bureau of Corrections is giving priority to those scheduled to be freed in two to three years.

"We want the skills learned from the training to be fresh in their minds when it's time for them to leave," said Medalla.

Accreditation

The Lamb of God Foundation is working to get accreditation from the Technology and Livelihood Resource Center, the government agency that disseminates information on applicable technologies, and provides training and funding for those wishing to start businesses using these technologies.

The foundation is also looking to get the TLRC to help it draw up a curriculum suited to the needs of the inmates.

Medalla said the foundation has also asked the Department of Science and Technology to help the bakery in the formulation of fortified breads which would be healthier for the inmates.

Back to old life

Pascual Pascua Jr., 35, is one inmate for whom life at the penitentiary approximates his old life.

Pascua is one of 21 inmates with experience as bakers who work at the prison bakery. All they needed was a short "refresher course" before being put to work at the bakery.

Pascua, who was convicted for murder and has been in prison for eight years, said he had worked at a bakery in Marawi since he was 15.

"I am happy that I am back to doing my old job. I thought I was of no use, but I feel worthy now," he said.

From page A1

Ermita, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo, Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno, Solicitor General Eduardo Nachura and Presidential Legal Adviser Sergio Apostol.

Also in contempt, according to Roque, is Makati City Jail Warden Melvic Oreiro.

The government claims that the transfer was in compliance with the decision of Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon to detain Smith at the Makati City Jail until the Philippines and the United States agreed on his place of detention in accordance with the VFA.

The Department of the Interior and Local government said Pozon's decision was fully complied with and Smith's transfer authorized because Foreign Secretary Alberto and US Ambassador Kristie Kenney signed an agreement on Smith's detention at the US Embassy compound.

But Roque said the transfer violated the Rules of Court.

Like Benedict Arnold

Pimentel said Ms Arroyo failed to stand up for the dignity of the Filipino nation. "She's guilty of gross 'lackeyism' in the manner of Benedict Arnold."

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez downplayed the possibility that the Palace decision to transfer Smith to the US Embassy would trigger massive protests that would cause Ms Arroyo's downfall.

He said there would be no political fallout.

"There is no groundswell of opposition to the transfer. In fact there are many Filipinos who think that Smith is not guilty," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez took offense at criticisms that the President had turned traitor when she ordered the transfer of Smith.

"She's acting in accordance with the rule of law. How can you be a traitor when you are on the side of the law," he said.

Besides, he said, the government—through the Office of the Solicitor General—had made it clear that it was taking the side of Smith only on the issue of custody, not on the question of his guilt or innocence.

The justice secretary said that those attacking the President may not know their law.

MAKATI City Jail: Daniel Smith does not live here anymore. BOY CABRIDO

Court of Appeals Presiding Justice Ruben Reyes said the transfer of Smith ahead of the final decision of an appellate division on the matter did not constitute an affront to the court.

Open to interpretation

Reyes said the 16th division's decision to simply state as "noted" Smith and the Office of the Solicitor General's manifestations and motions could be open to "interpretation."

Besides, Reyes told the INQUIRER that "personally," he wanted to be "broadminded" about the transfer of Smith.

"Personally, I want to be open-minded about it. Until the court has spoken, the matter is subject to interpretation," he said.

He said he was just expressing his own views because the issue was being handled by the division under Associate Justice Apolinario D. Bruselas Jr.

Supervening event

In a resolution issued on Friday, Bruselas again simply "noted" the manifestation and motion filed by the solicitor general on Dec. 28 informing the court that there was a "supervening event" in the case.

"You know that 'noted' is neither a grant, nor a denial. I expect that by next week, there would be a decision on the case," Reyes said.

He said the supervening event—the signing of an agreement between the US Embassy and the Department of Foreign Affairs on the transfer of Smith to the US Embassy—may "cast a different light" on the issue.

Contempt of court

But he said a definite ruling by the Bruselas division this week may finally "clear up" the issue.

Reyes said it was unlikely that the court would use its contempt powers against those who ordered or caused the transfer of Smith.

"Normally when there are contentious issues, the court does not resort to contempt of court (procedures)," he said.

Fugitive

Evalyn Ursua, Nicole's lawyer, said Smith was a fugitive from justice.

"People should remember that he is a convicted criminal and yet he walked out of prison aided by the US Embassy and our own government's executive officials. They acted in connivance to make the escape possible," Ursua said.

But Smith's lawyer, Joan de Venecia, disagreed. "That is just their propaganda statement," she said.

De Venecia said that for one to be branded a fugitive, "(the person) escaped and is beyond the reach of the law."

"But Smith did not escape. He was only transferred to another confinement. If the court wants us to produce him, we will produce him. A fugitive is someone who hides in the mountains," she said.

De Venecia added that Smith's transfer from the Makati City Jail to the US Embassy "is a diplomatic, government-to-government thing."

A DILG official said he received assurance from top US Embassy security officials that Smith was confined to his 120-square-foot "detention room" on the embassy premises.

Marius Corpus, the interior undersecretary overseeing the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, said that if everything went as planned, he and the rest of the Philippine "custodial team" would see for themselves the situation of the convict today.

"[The Americans] said that even if the embassy is closed, we will be allowed to enter," Corpus told the INQUIRER.

US holiday today

US President George W. Bush has declared Jan. 2 a national day of mourning to remember former US President Gerald Ford who died last week. Federal offices, including US embassies, will be closed.

"We can visit him anytime. We are just finishing the composition of the custodial team. We're waiting for the PNP to come up with their members," Corpus said.

The final composition of the custodial team will be announced today by Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno.

Corpus said he had received an assurance from US officials that Smith would be presented in court should it be required by the Court of Appeals.

Gonzalez said Malacañang was ready to go to the Supreme Court to ensure that Smith would remain in US custody should the Court of Appeals junk Smith's petition to nullify an order of a lower court committing him to the Makati City Jail. *With a report from Nikko Dizon*

Another Bayan Muna leader . . .

From page A1

ber killed in Bicol in the last three weeks, after Cris Frivaldo, Gil Gojol and Francisco Bantog—who were shot dead in Sorsogon.

Alvarado was the 42nd activist murdered in the region last year, according to Jose Pernia, Bayan Muna-Bicol regional coordinator.

White Corolla

Alvarado was traveling in Barangay Sta. Cruz on his way home to Barangay San Lorenzo when an unidentified man armed with a .45-cal. pistol shot him in his white Toyota Corolla, police said.

Initial investigation showed that the perpetrator was backed up by two other men who picked up the gunman after the shooting.

The suspects fled toward Bonifacio Street in the same village and headed to neighboring Oas town.

SPO3 Edgar Tuason, investigator, said there were many witnesses to the shooting but they chose to keep silent except to say that the suspects were not wearing bonnets.

Police rushed Alvarado to the Josefina Belmonte Duran district hospital but he was dead on arrival at 4:58 p.m. "He sustained two gunshot wounds in the left arm," according to Dr. Shiela Salonga.

Carlo was on his way home to Ligao from his work in Legazpi City to celebrate New Year's Eve with the family when he received a phone call from his brother telling him to come home immediately.

Smiling in death

"Even before my brother told me the details, I already knew what had happened," Carlo said.

"When I saw my father in the hospital bed lifeless, I saw that he was smiling. I did not see any trace of pain or suffering in him," Carlo said.

He said his father was happy during the last three days of his life because they were complete as a family.

His father was about 5 feet, 5 inches but looked tall.

He could command the respect of the people he would meet, according to Carlo.

Strict but jolly

"He was very strict but a jolly and loving father with a big vision for the community such as free medical supplies and services for the poor people."

Alvarado, who passed the entrance exam for the University of the Philippines, dreamed of becoming a doctor but ended up finishing journalism because his parents could not afford the cost of a medical education.

Carlo said many people usually came to their house to ask for help from Bayan Muna's medical assistance program. Whenever his father would do something for the people they would give him tomatoes, vegetables and "camote" (sweet potato) in return.

Lived life to fullest

"My father lived his life to the fullest and died selflessly. Let it be an eye-opener. We are proud of him," Carlo said.

Alvarado died fulfilled because he was able to help a lot of people, according to his wife Rosanna.

She knew of no death threats received by her husband because there were only holiday greetings in his cell phone, she said.

"The only New Year's gift we could give him is to continue the good things he started," Rosanna said.

Big help to poor

Editha Otilano, 50, a farmer from Barangay Basag in Ligao, came to Alvarado's house yesterday to see for herself if the news that Alvarado died was true.

"We could not believe he is gone. He was a big help to the poor people in our village," Otilano said.

She usually accompanied the poor villagers in their place to Alvarado's house whenever they needed assistance.

Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo said the killing of Alvarado was meant to weaken the party-list group's chances in the May elections.

But he said the killings of Bayan Muna members would not deter the group from fielding candidates.

"We will turn our grief into a stronger commitment to champion new politics and the politics of change. The death squads of President Arroyo's Oplan Bantay Laya may kill our leaders and members, but they cannot vanquish the progressive and popular ideals Bayan Muna stands for," Ocampo, Bayan Muna president, said in a statement.

Formed by the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan and allied progressive groups in 1999, Bayan Muna joined the party-list elections in 2001.

It emerged No. 1 with 1.8 million votes, the highest in the party-list system, giving its nominees Ocampo, Crispin Beltran and Liza Maza seats in the House of Representatives.

Bayan Muna repeated this feat in 2004, obtaining 1.2 million votes, still the highest among party-list groups, thus ensuring it three seats. Allied peasant group Anakpawis won two seats and women's group Gabriela, one seat.

Bayan Muna predicted more killings of activists next year.

2-year deadline

"He's a member of a respected family in Albay but still he was not spared by Ms Arroyo's death squad," De Castro said.

"The incident only shows that Malacañang is ready to do anything just to beat the two-year deadline imposed by Ms Arroyo to wipe out her enemies," Pernia said in a statement.

Lt. Col. Roderick Parayno, spokesperson of the Southern Luzon Command, said it was unlikely that the military killed Alvarado. *With reports from Michael Lim Ubac in Manila; Delfin T. Mallari Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon, and AFP*

'2007 election crucial . . .

From page A1

direction of governance in a country that has lurched from one crisis to another over allegations that President Macapagal-Arroyo cheated in the 2004 polls.

Speaking for the administration camp, House Majority Leader Prospero Nograles said the elections would "play a critical role" in setting that direction.

"The administration and the opposition will start counting their marbles depending on the election results," said Nograles.

House Minority Leader Francis Escudero said the Filipinos' hope for a better future hinged on the credibility of the May elections.

"Elections empower the people and enable them to participate directly in governance while promoting accountability at the same time," he said.

Nograles said the political party that would secure majorities in both chambers of Congress would "give us a picture of a new political landscape till 2010" and determine the nation's immediate future.

"Election fever is up in the air and there is very little that the House can do at this point," said Nograles.

Check corruption

But Escudero stressed that the government should curb "or at least limit corruption and abuse of government powers by ensuring equal and fair application of the laws to all."

Presidential political adviser Gabriel Claudio said winning a credible election was part of the agenda of President Macapagal-Arroyo for this year.

While pushing for Charter change continues to be the administration's fondest objective, Claudio believed this should be deferred until after the May polls.

"There is nothing whimsical about our bid for Charter change but its timing and the manner [of going about it] should be determined by the people through consensus," he said.

In a phone interview yesterday, Claudio said the challenge for the Arroyo administration in the new year lay in being able to "manage the political developments in the country in a way that will not deter but rather boost the momentum of the economic takeoff."

NOGRALES: Election fever in the air

ESCUDERO: Credibility of May polls

This has become critical especially now that "there are visible signs of the country's economic takeoff," he said.

Markets watching

He said all efforts at destabilization "should be totally eliminated from the political radar screen in order to protect the present momentum of our economic program."

Claudio underscored the need for the administration to eliminate or "keep to the barest minimum, political tensions and uncertainties" in the country.

"The markets, investors, businessmen and creditors react positively to signs of government being in control of the political situation," he said.

'Administration win is wise'

Asked how the elections could affect the political climate, he said: "If the results are less favorable to the administration, it can dampen the business climate and investor confidence in the country."

He said this was why an administration victory at the polls "is a wise and reasonable investment for people to make in 2007."

"The stability of the country depends on victory of the administration," he said.

Claudio said the administration was confident not only of being able to put up a "formidable" lineup of candidates in the senatorial and local contests but of activating a nationwide campaign that would ensure victory in May.

He said it was important for the administration to hold credible and fair and orderly elections because that would "maintain, if not enhance, the economic stability of the country."

Claudio said he would like to believe that people were inclined to support the administration candidates "because they are seeing visible indications of an economic recovery which can be sustained if the administration can pose a convincing victory in the elections."

Ang Unang Bulaga sa 2007...
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Lacson out of mayoral race

Senator says residency problem prompted decision

LACSON : Out JESS YUSON

By TJ Burgonio

SEN. PANFILO "PING" LACSON is seeking reelection after all.

Over the possibility of being disqualified over questions about his residency, the opposition senator has abandoned his much-talked about plan to run for mayor of Manila in this year's May elections.

"No, I'm not running for mayor anymore. I'll just seek reelection," Lacson said in a phone interview, confirming speculations that he was dropping his bid for the city's top post.

The senator said he made his decision after his legal staff conducted a thorough research into the matter. He also held several consultations with legal luminaries and election lawyers, who all advised him to drop his bid because there was a much bigger chance of him getting disqualified because he might not be able to meet some residency requirements.

"One prominent election lawyer told me that I have less than a 50 percent chance of not getting disqualified," Lacson said, referring to lawyer Sixto Bril-

LACSON/A18

New Year's Day shooting leaves nine people hurt

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

GUNSHOTS RANG AT THE SAME MOMENT neighbors in a village in Pasig City broke into cheers to welcome the New Year.

The residents were just holding a street party in Barangay Palatiw when four men opened fire at them.

Nine persons, including two girls, were seriously injured yesterday while 50-year-old Eduardo Bernardo was killed, turning the revelry into grief.

The hours leading to the New Year also turned bloody in nearby areas as two men were also killed in separate incidents in the cities of Pasig and Marikina.

Police said the victims of the shooting spree in Palatiw were holding a party along with other neighbors on Santos Street on New Year's Eve.

When the residents started cheering at midnight, four men on board two motorcycles drove into the street.

Seconds later, gunshots drowned the cheers. The four men, armed with .45 caliber and 9 mm handguns, suddenly started firing at the group, police chief Senior Supt. Francisco Uyami said.

"The (four men) shot randomly. They did not care whoever was hit," Uyami also told the INQUIRER, quoting witnesses.

The residents scampered away, trying to protect themselves and their loved ones from the rain of bullets.

But the shooting spree did not spare 5-year-old Joanna Grace Kagakit and 6-year-old Rona Hermogenes.

Police said the following residents were also seriously injured: Armando Falabi, 38; Roberto Jultilla, 43; Joleny Mamagan,37; Ruben Frias, 26; Jenny Laprota, 32; Eduardo

NEW YEAR'S/A18

'Kwitis' burns roof of church in Las Piñas

By Jocelyn R. Uy and Tessa R. Salazar

A FIRE STARTED BY A FIRECRACKER destroyed a church in Moonwalk Subdivision, Las Piñas City, on New Year's Day.

According to witnesses, a *kwitis* (sky rocket) landed on the roof of the Mary Immaculate Parish Church, also known as the "Nature Church," shortly after midnight yesterday.

The fire, which reached the second alarm, spread quickly because the roof was made of flammable materials, said Las Piñas deputy fire marshal Aldwin Salazar.

No one was reported killed or injured in the incident although damage to the church was estimated at around P500,000, according to fire investigator SFO2 Roberto Nolan.

Not insured

But Father Fidel Fabile, the church parish priest, placed the damage at nearly a million pesos. He said the church was not insured against fire.

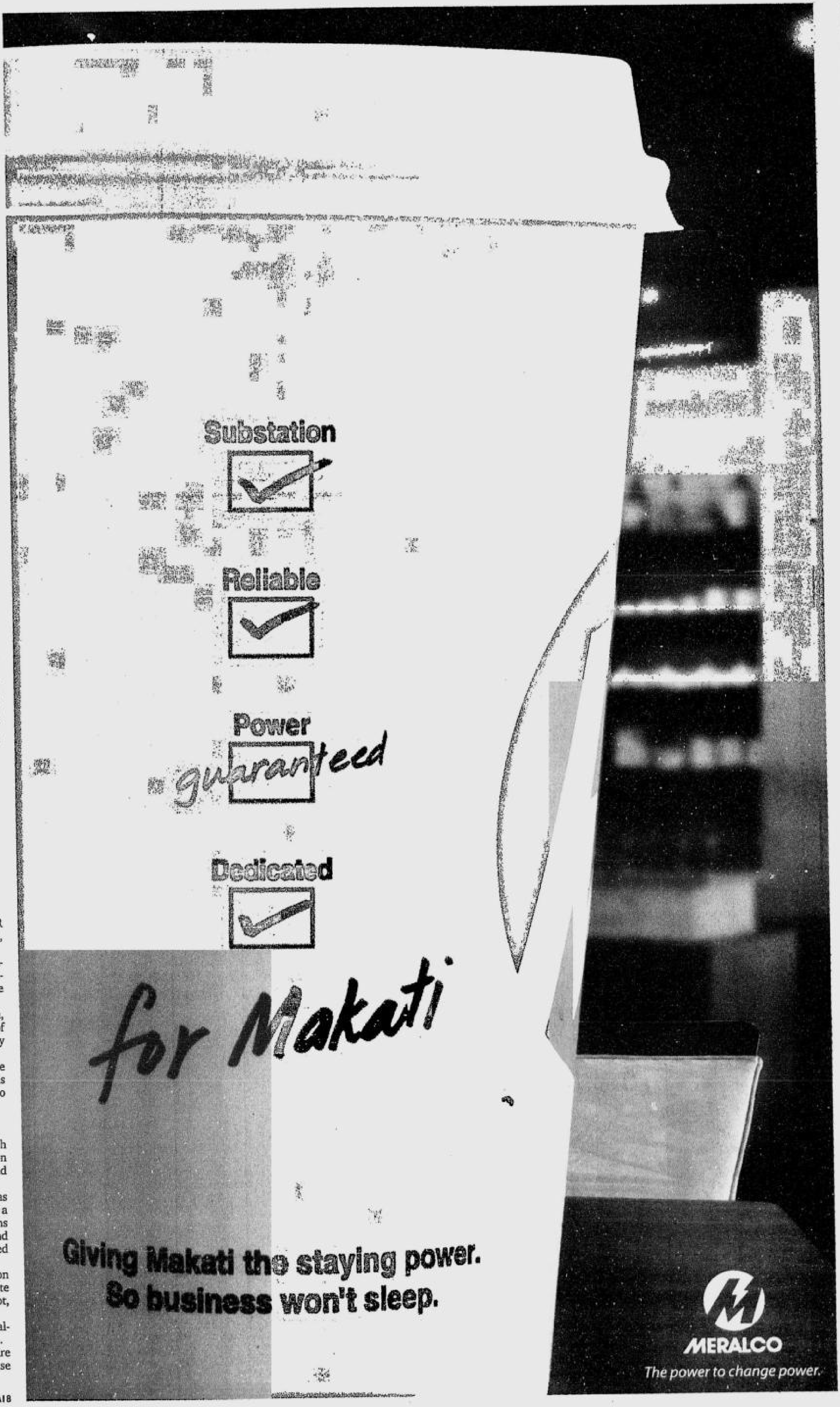
The fire ate up the entire roof which was made of 40,000 anahaw leaves topped with a canvas sheet. It also destroyed 176 lanterns made from capiz but the church seats and pews, made out of tree stumps and logs felled by past typhoons, were spared.

Hundreds of residents in the subdivision rushed out of their homes and went to the site of the church, which sits on a 4,000-sq m lot, when they saw the fire.

The 20-year-old church was conceptualized by architect Francisco "Bobby" Manosa.

Fabile said residents tried to put out the fire with pails of water but failed to do so because they could not reach the 30-foot-high roof.

'KWITIS'/A18



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NBI: Raids, arrests hiked price of shabu

By Margaux C. Ortiz

THE STREET PRICE OF METHAMPHETAMINE hydrochloride (shabu) rose from P5,000 to almost P20,000 per five grams last year, according to the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) Anti-Illegal Drugs Task Force.

NBI National Capital Region (NCR) chief and task force commander Ruel Lasala attributed the price increase to the scarcity of the drug following the dismantling of numerous shabu laboratories and the apprehension of drug traffickers.

Lasala said that from 2000 to 2005, the price of shabu remained stable at P5,000 per gram. "The demand has remained the same despite the diminished supply of shabu," he explained.

According to the NBI official, the task force's most significant achievement last year was the arrest of Amin Imam Boratong and his wife Sheryl last November.

The couple allegedly owned the shabu market in Pasig City and supervised other illegal drug-related businesses worth almost a billion pesos.

The task force also arrested suspected drug trafficker Paul Tan in Caloocan City last August. Tan allegedly operated a clandestine shabu laboratory in Bataan.

Lasala said the apprehension of Mike Makaumbao and Hadji Saed in Quiapo, Manila last year also significantly reduced the supply of shabu in the area.

On the other hand, the dismantling of a cluster of shabu dens in Bocaue, Bulacan, last March resulted in the arrest of 75 drug pushers, users, runners and couriers, and the confiscation of assorted drug paraphernalia.

The NBI also busted a clandestine shabu laboratory in Dingalan, Aurora last August, arrested four Chinese suspects and confiscated P120 million worth of crystallized and liquid drugs.

At least P160 million worth of ephedrine, a primary shabu ingredient, were seized in Quiapo, Manila, in June, Lasala added. The operation also led to the arrest of two pushers.

Aside from shabu-related operations, the bureau last year seized 53,000 vials of ketamine—a drug used by young people during rave parties—in a house in Parañaque City. They also arrested the owner of the drugs, a Pakistani identified as Harris Abichandani.

Judge orders apprehension of suspected illegal recruiters

By Tina G. Santos

A MANILA JUDGE HAS ORDERED THE arrest of four people who allegedly duped several job seekers more than six years ago.

Judge Silvino Pampilo Jr. of the Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 26 issued warrants for the arrest of Yrmingarda Magcasi, a resident of Rosario, Batangas; Florence Cabilas, of La Trinidad, Benguet; and Roberto Bansil and Regina Prado, both of Ermita, Manila.

No bail was recommended for the four who are now facing several counts of estafa and illegal recruitment, the judge said.

"I urge other people who had been lured with promises of jobs abroad by these suspects to come forward and lodge complaints," Pampilo added.

At least 10 complainants said that in July 2000, they applied for work at VHM International Manpower Services in Ermita, Manila.

They claimed that the suspects, who identified themselves as employees of the company, offered to help send them to South Korea as factory workers. The suspects also asked them to pay almost P1 million in placement and processing fees.

Two of the victims, Liberato Francisco and Lorena Suba, claimed that they gave P120,000 and P90,000, respectively, to the suspects.

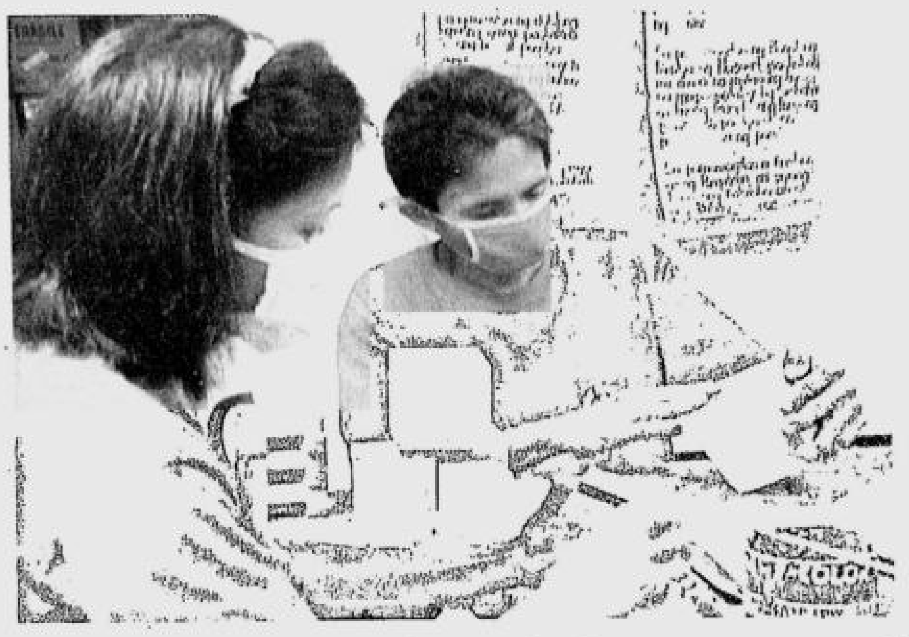
After several months, the victims were issued visas but these were discovered to be fake when immigration officers at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport refused to let them leave the country.

The victims claimed they later learned that the suspects were not employees of the recruitment agency, which prompted them to file complaints against the four.

A certification issued by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency also showed that the suspects were not licensed or authorized to recruit workers for overseas employment.

DID YOU KNOW

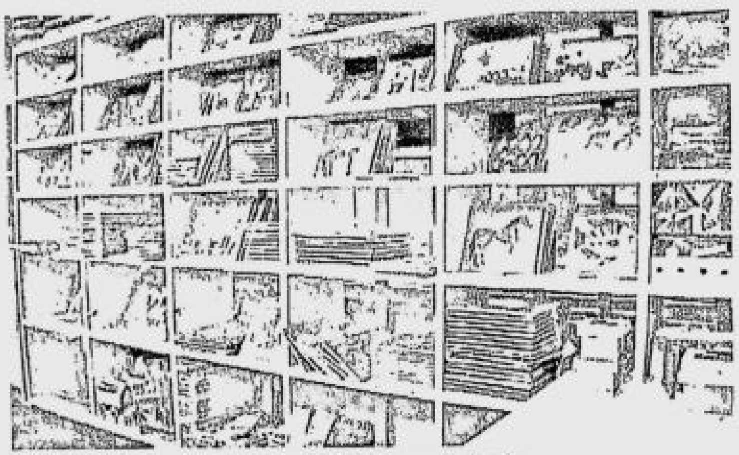
Makati became a city on Jan. 2, 1995, when then President Fidel V. Ramos signed Republic Act 7854. On Feb. 4, 1995, the city charter was ratified by an overwhelming 91 percent of the voters who participated in the plebiscite. *Cyril L. Bonabente, INQUIRER Research*



WORKERS of Bahay Pangarap produce environment-friendly wooden educational toys which are sold in the Philippines and in other countries.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

A dreamland for toy makers

By Ed L. Santoalla
Contributor



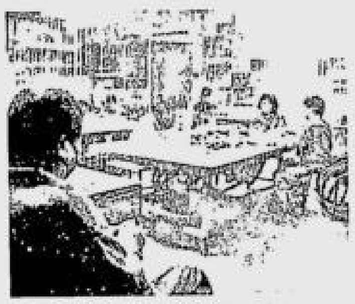
SOME of the toys are also used in Montessori schools.

AFTER OPENING THEIR HOLIDAY presents, children, at times, would ask their parents: Who made our toys? Mommy and Daddy would then be hard pressed to come up with imaginative answers such as "the elves in the North Pole" or "high-tech robots."

These replies are certainly preferable to this one: "Overworked and underpaid (Chinese) factory workers who could have inhaled all the carcinogenic and mutagenic chemicals while making these small plastic parts." Parents know that talking about the toy makers' plight would be enough to ruin their children's fun.

The Fair Trade movement hopes that parents would someday provide better answers to the question.

With the "Buy Local, Buy Fair Campaign," the movement calls for parents to consider carefully the toys they give their children. It also offers an alternative: socially, environmentally friendly toys like the ones at Bahay Pangarap. Their wooden educational toys go beyond colors and designs. The story of the toy makers of Bahay Pangarap can fill up a whole bedtime story session in itself.



OF THE 64 WORKERS at Bahay Pangarap, 48 are persons with disabilities.

As a 9-month-old baby in Olongapo City, Rebecca Buwela was stricken with polio. Coming from a poor family that could not afford to feed her enough, much less send her to school when she was growing up, Rebecca did not have much hope of being able to work or even raise her own family.

The same was true of Edgar Sarap who dreamt of becoming a doctor. But because of polio, he lost his hope of becoming someone of any importance to his family and society. He became suicidal and was only saved by a caring person who talked him out of his depression and sent him to school.

Edgar finished high school but because he is disabled, he could not get any work. Not in his hometown of Jaro, Iloilo, and not in Manila where he fled to in search of better fortune.

Today, Buwela and Sarap share one thing in common: they are disabled persons who have become productive, thanks to Bahay Pangarap. A subsidiary of Tahanang Walang Hagdanan, it provides a home and livelihood for disabled persons who aspire to be productive in spite of their handicap.

The two are among the 48 disabled members of the 64-strong workforce of Bahay Pangarap's woodcraft factory in Barangay San Agustin, Novaliches, Quezon City. It churns out educational toys and packaging materials made out of *palo china*, excess wood from sawmills and the plywood replacement material called Modified Density Fiber from Malaysia and Taiwan.

According to Nelia Treseñe, the general manager, most of the factory's products are sold in the Philippines, mainly to middle class buyers, institutions and shopping centers such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development's Early Childhood Development Program and SM Megamall.

Its products also reach foreign markets such as the US, UK, Italy, Belgium, Japan and the Middle East, Treseñe said.

'Kwitis' burns roof...

From page A17

"In 15 minutes, the place was like an inferno," Fabile said.

Alberto Torres, the church's guard on duty, claimed he saw a firecracker land on the roof and asked a parishioner to call firefighters.

Looter arrested

During the fire, a looter attempted to break into the adjoining Nature's Café but was quickly apprehended by other guards.

The Nature Church was initiated by Italian priest Father Pierino Rogliardi, a Mother Teresa awardee for his work on Emmaus Village, a housing project for the poor inside Moonwalk Subdivision.

Rogliardi had earlier expressed concern about firecrackers burning the roof of the church.

Considered a landmark in Las Piñas in addition to the more famous Bamboo Organ, the church was featured in European magazines.

A separate chapel (a mini version of the Nature Church), the Blessed Sacrament, a maternity clinic, a school, the café and the parish office were spared from the fire.

'City of Stars' wants to hold its own film festival

By DJ Yap

MOVE OVER, METRO MANILA Film Festival and Cinemanila. Make room for the Quezon City Film Festival.

Quezon City, which used to be known as the "City of Stars" for its promotion of the movie industry, has announced plans for the launch of its own film festival.

To be launched by this year or in 2008 at the latest, the film festival shall be organized by the newly created Quezon City Film Development Commission, officials said in a statement.

Preparations for the film festival are already under way, particularly with the establishment of the Quezon City Film Foundation, the implementing arm of the commission.

The commission was formed through a city ordinance that Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr. signed into law in June.

Under the ordinance, it shall be the policy of the Quezon City government to "promote and support the development and growth of the local film industry..."

It also orders the QC Film Development Commission to "establish, organize, operate and undertake local and international film festivals, exhibitions and similar activities" for the city.

In addition, the commission should develop an incentive system for, among others, film producers, directors, scriptwriters and cinematographers to encourage the production of quality films in the city.

The 15 members of the new commission include Vice Mayor Herbert Bautista, the majority and minority leaders of the city council, the head of the city's cultural and tourism affairs office and representatives of Mowelfund and the Kapisanan ng mga Artista ng Pelikulang Pilipino at Telebisyon.

My New Year's resolutions

ON TARGET
Ramon Tulfo

THE START OF A NEW YEAR IS a time to make resolutions to make one a better person in the coming year.

I have my own New Year's resolutions and they are:

I will try to be a better journalist

I will be honest. If I am caught cheating, I will resign to save the profession of journalism from further shame.

If I am very sick, I will not hide my illness from my friends. Neither will I hide it from my editors and readers for they should know my state of mind. A sick journalist may not be in the proper state of mind to do his job.

I will only berate my subordinates in private. If I make the mistake of scolding a subordinate in public, I will immediately apologize to him or her. My subordinates also have feelings.

I will not cover up for my friend's or relative's crime.

I will be faithful to my spouse. If I can't be, I will choose a lover who's of my age. I will not choose a lover who is young enough to be my daughter.

I will not allow my spouse to use my influence as a journalist. I will tell her that it's me, not her, who will be blamed if she peddles influence.

If I find out that my spouse has a lover or lovers, I will immediately break up with her. It's difficult to pretend that all's well with me and my spouse in order to please the public. Our friends are not that stupid not to see through the veil of hypocrisy.

If I find out that one of my spouse's lovers is using my influence, I will use all my power to have him arrested.

I will advise my spouse not to quarrel with people who criticize her. Such criticisms should even be valued.

I will not abandon friends who tell me my shortcomings. They are real friends.

I will discipline all my children. I will not allow one of them to destroy the good name that my other children are painstakingly trying to protect.

Lacson out of mayoral race

From page A17

lantes Jr., counsel for the late actor Fernando Poe Jr. "So I thought, 'What's there to seek or pursue?'"

Under the law, persons transferring residence for electoral purposes must show proof of their intention to live permanently in their new address. They should also abandon their previous residence, among others.

There had been legal precedents on the disqualification of local candidates because of their failure to meet this requirement, according to the senator, a longtime resident of Cavite.

"That's where we thought we might have some problems. The attending requirements were not as simple as they appeared to be," Lacson said, even as he pointed out that one of his opponents seemed set on filing a disqualification case against him using the residency requirement as a basis.

The senator announced last November that he was joining the race for Manila mayor before a large crowd of allies and supporters at the Manila Hotel. He was the first among the current crop of aspirants to do so.

The other hopefuls include Lacson's own colleague, Sen. Alfredo Lim, Mayor Lito Atienza's son Ali, Vice Mayor Danilo Lacuna, former Manila Rep. Mark Jimenez, Rep. Jose Hizon, Rep. Rudy Bacani, former First Lady Imelda Marcos, and former antinarcotics agent Mary "Rosebud" Ong.

Lacson said some had even suggested that he just "fix" his documents to meet the requirements but he rejected this outright, saying, "I did not agree to it because it bordered on an integrity issue."

New Year's Day shooting...

From page A17

Edcay, 32, and Evelyn Hubilla, 41.

Bernardo was rushed along with his nine injured neighbors to the Pasig City General Hospital, but he was declared dead on arrival.

Neighbors told the police the shooting spree could be the work of a rival group.

The villagers in the barangay are divided into ethno-linguistic groups, Uyami explained.

He said they would investigate reports linking the shooting spree to a stabbing incident in the city about a week ago, when some members of the two different groups of villagers figured in a brawl, leaving two men dead.

"Some witnesses told us some members of that other group threatened to get even with them," Uyami added.

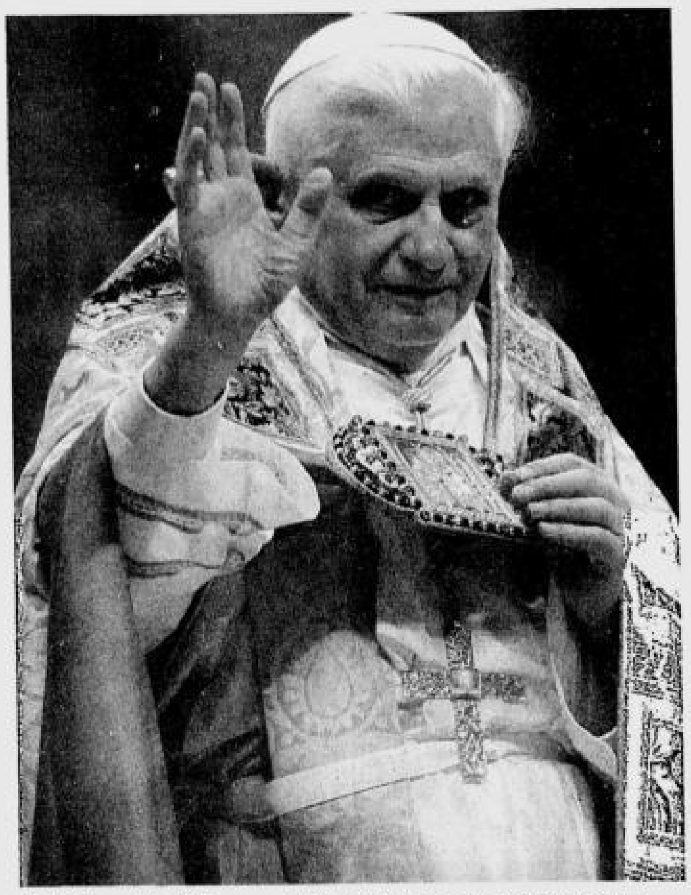
Police are also investigating the killing of 52-year-old driver Cesar Concepcion in Barangay Caniogan, also in Pasig City.

His attackers not only stabbed him in the chest and belly but also shot him in the back while he was on Sixto Antonio Avenue at about 11:45 p.m. on Sunday, police said.

In Marikina City, 35-year-old Dindo De Ocampo was also stabbed to death after he tried to pacify a brawl between two drunk men.

His alleged attacker, 43-year-old Jerick Rico, also sustained wounds after he, too, ended up being stabbed.

The police said Rico and a man police identified only as Fredo were fighting when De Ocampo tried to pacify them. This irked Rico who stabbed the victim.



POPE Benedict XVI waves to the faithful as he leads the Te Deum prayer in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 31. REUTERS

NEW YEAR MESSAGE

Pope calls for Middle East peace agreement

VATICAN CITY—POPE BENEDICT XVI CALLED Monday for a peace accord in the Middle East, embroiled in a "conflict that has persisted for too long," during his New Year's Day Mass at St. Peter's Basilica.

Marking World Peace Day, he referred to "the scene of the shepherds of Bethlehem visiting Jesus in the manger," asking: "How can you not look again at the dire situation that characterizes this land where Jesus was born?"

The 79-year-old Pontiff asked: "How can you not implore with insistent prayer that the day of peace arrives as soon as possible to this region, the day when the conflict that has persisted for too long will be resolved?

"A peace accord, to be durable, must rest on respect for dignity and the rights of each person," he urged the Vatican diplomatic corps attending the Mass.

"In the face of the threats to peace that are unfortunately ever-present, in the face of situations of injustice and violence that persist in many parts of the world, before continuing armed conflicts often forgotten by much of public opinion, and the danger of terrorism that disturbs peoples' serenity, it becomes more than ever necessary to work together for peace," he said.

On Dec. 12 Benedict sent a message to the world's 1.1 billion Catholics ahead of World Peace Day in which he condemned what he called the transformation of religion "into an ideology," and said that "a war in the name of God is never acceptable."

The wide-ranging message also condemned violations of religious freedoms, inequality of the sexes, "disrespectful" attitudes toward the environment, religion transformed into "ideology," terrorism, human rights abuses and the spread of nuclear weapons.

"The way to ensure a future of peace for everyone is found not only in international accords for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also in the determined commitment to seek their reduction and definitive dismantling," the Pope said.

In his first public address of the year, Pope Benedict said world peace can only be achieved if individuals' human rights are respected, stressing that there can be no excuse for treating people as "objects."

Two days after the hanging of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein—an event the Vatican condemned as "tragic"— the Pope said on Monday that human rights must be put at the heart of the global struggle to end war.

"It is because every human individual, without distinction of race, culture or religion, is created in the image and likeness of God, that he is filled with the same dignity of person," Benedict said in a sermon in St. Peter's Basilica.

"That is why he must be respected. No reason can ever justify doing with him whatever one pleases, as if he is an object," he said. *AFP, Reuters*

WORLDBRIEFS

Dog mauls girl

LONDON—A 5-year-old girl was mauled to death by a dog at her home in northern England on Monday, police said. The dog, which police described as a "pit-bull terrier type dog," attacked the girl and a woman, believed to be the child's grandmother, in the early hours of the morning at a house in St. Helens, near Liverpool in northwest England. The woman was seriously injured and is being treated in hospital, but the girl was fatally wounded in the attack. "This is such a tragic incident. When a child loses her life in such circumstances, it has an effect on the whole community," police superintendent Jon Ward said in a statement. *Reuters*

More survivors found

REMBANG—Indonesian fishermen and search and rescue teams have found around 200 survivors as bad weather hampered the search Sunday for some 400 people still missing after a ferry sank off the coast of Java, officials said. Warships, fishing vessels and helicopters have braved continuing bad weather and rough seas to scour the waters off the north coast of Java since the "Senopati Nusantara" (Archipelago Commander) sank late Friday. Some 177 survivors had been rescued, the official Antara news agency quoted the transport ministry as saying. But Transport Minister Hatta Radjasa later said 157 had been saved, with 125 already ashore and others being brought in on ships. *AFP*

Final stand

KISMAYU—Somali Islamists fled on Monday from their final stronghold toward the Kenyan border in what could mark the end of a nearly two-week war with the Ethiopian-backed government. Several thousand Somalia Islamic Courts Council (SICC) fighters, who had made a last stand north of Kismayu port, melted away overnight after advancing Ethiopian and government troops shelled their front line, witnesses said. The leaders and fighters of the SICC—who were driven from Mogadishu on Thursday—fled further south from the Indian Ocean port toward neighboring Kenya, residents said. Some believed they were moving to the hilly region of Buur Gaabo, just on the Somali side of the border. *Reuters*

Cleric's warning

TEHRAN—Iran will never give up its nuclear program and unfair treatment of the country over its atomic work will have consequences for the West and the Middle East, powerful cleric Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said on Sunday. The UN Security Council voted unanimously last week to impose sanctions on Iran's trade in sensitive nuclear materials and technology, in an attempt to stop uranium enrichment work that could produce material that could be used in bombs. "This is a dangerous resolution ... It will not bring about the desired outcome. No resolution can make us give up atomic work," Rafsanjani, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, told worshippers at Tehran University on the occasion of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. Rafsanjani said there would be consequences if Iran was treated unfairly over its nuclear program, which Tehran says is for peaceful purposes only and the West fears is a cover for building nuclear bombs. *Reuters*

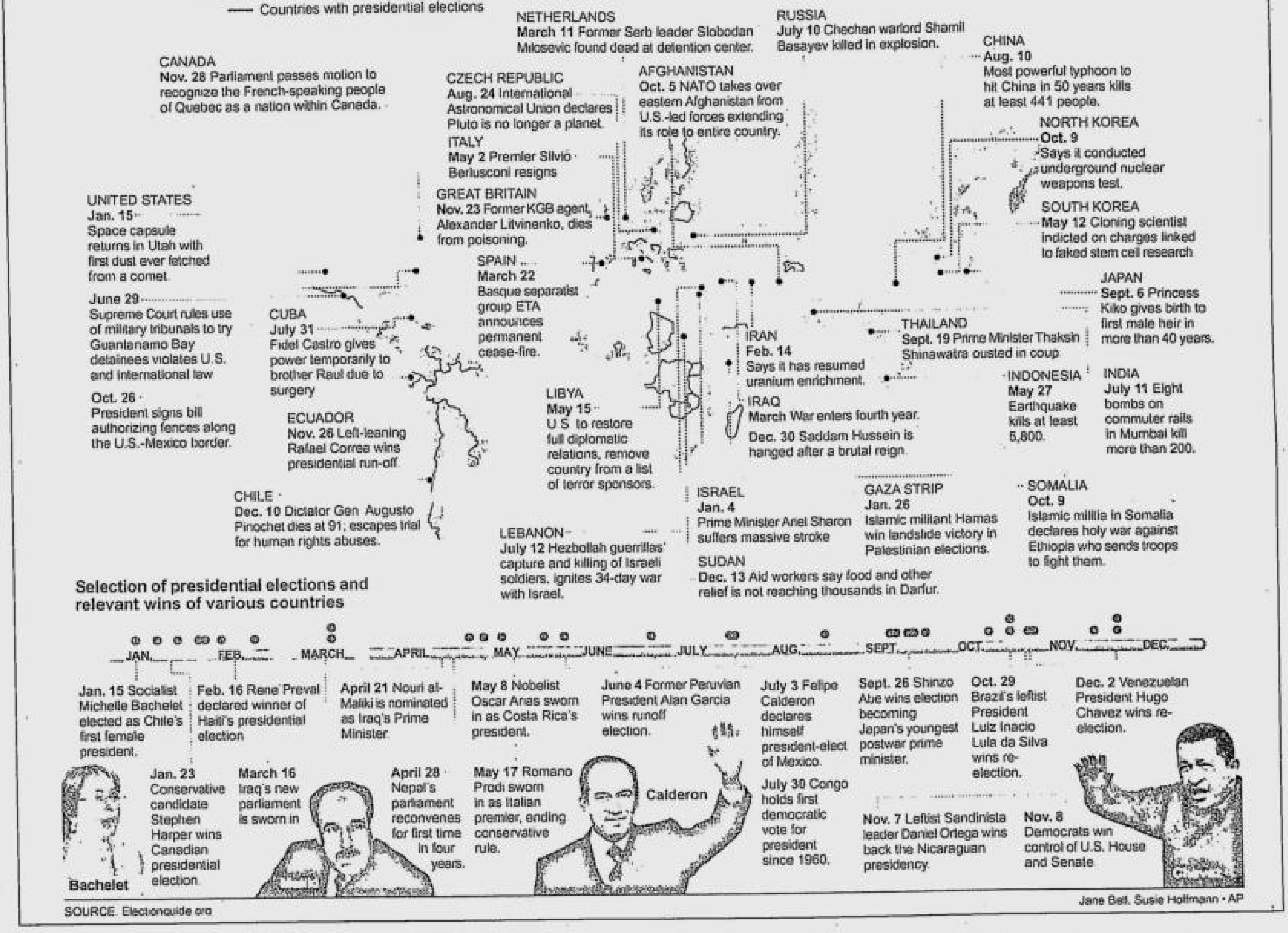
THE YEAR IN REVIEW

World weary of wars

Selection of events from around the world

—— Countries with presidential elections

In 2006 the world grappled with wars, security threats, an escalating confrontation over nuclear proliferation with Iran and North Korea, and yes, even the loss of one of the Solar System's nine planets, Pluto. The shadow of Iraq put Democrats in charge of the U.S. Congress and presidential elections elsewhere saw gains for the left.



CANADA
Nov. 28 Parliament passes motion to recognize the French-speaking people of Quebec as a nation within Canada.

UNITED STATES
Jan. 15 Space capsule returns in Utah with first dust ever fetched from a comet.
June 29 Supreme Court rules use of military tribunals to try Guantanamo Bay detainees violates U.S. and international law
Oct. 26 President signs bill authorizing fences along the U.S.-Mexico border.

CUBA
July 31 Fidel Castro gives power temporarily to brother Raul due to surgery

ECUADOR
Nov. 26 Left-leaning Rafael Correa wins presidential run-off

CHILE
Dec. 10 Dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet dies at 91; escapes trial for human rights abuses.

NETHERLANDS
March 11 Former Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic found dead at detention center.

CZECH REPUBLIC
Aug. 24 International Astronomical Union declares Pluto is no longer a planet.

ITALY
May 2 Premier Silvio Berlusconi resigns

GREAT BRITAIN
Nov. 23 Former KGB agent, Alexander Litvinenko, dies from poisoning.

SPAIN
March 22 Basque separatist group ETA announces permanent cease-fire.

LIBYA
May 15 U.S. to restore full diplomatic relations, remove country from a list of terror sponsors.

LEBANON
July 12 Hezbollah guerrillas' capture and killing of Israeli soldiers, ignites 34-day war with Israel.

RUSSIA
July 10 Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev killed in explosion.

AFGHANISTAN
Oct. 5 NATO takes over eastern Afghanistan from U.S.-led forces extending its role to entire country.

IRAN
Feb. 14 Says it has resumed uranium enrichment.

IRAQ
March War enters fourth year.
Dec. 30 Saddam Hussein is hanged after a brutal reign.

ISRAEL
Jan. 4 Prime Minister Ariel Sharon suffers massive stroke

SUDAN
Dec. 13 Aid workers say food and other relief is not reaching thousands in Darfur.

GAZA STRIP
Jan. 26 Islamic militant Hamas win landslide victory in Palestinian elections.

CHINA
Aug. 10 Most powerful typhoon to hit China in 50 years kills at least 441 people.

NORTH KOREA
Oct. 9 Says it conducted underground nuclear weapons test.

SOUTH KOREA
May 12 Cloning scientist indicted on charges linked to faked stem cell research

JAPAN
Sept. 6 Princess Kiko gives birth to first male heir in more than 40 years.

THAILAND
Sept. 19 Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra ousted in coup

INDONESIA
May 27 Earthquake kills at least 5,800.

INDIA
July 11 Eight bombs on commuter rails in Mumbai kill more than 200.

SOMALIA
Oct. 9 Islamic militia in Somalia declares holy war against Ethiopia who sends troops to fight them.

Selection of presidential elections and relevant wins of various countries

Jan. 15 Socialist Michelle Bachelet elected as Chile's first female president.
Jan. 23 Conservative candidate Stephen Harper wins Canadian presidential election.
Feb. 16 Rene Preval declared winner of Haiti's presidential election
March 16 Iraq's new parliament is sworn in
April 21 Nouri al-Maliki is nominated as Iraq's Prime Minister.
April 28 Nepal's parliament reconvenes for first time in four years.
May 8 Nobelist Oscar Arias sworn in as Costa Rica's president.
May 17 Romano Prodi sworn in as Italian premier, ending conservative rule.
June 4 Former Peruvian President Alan Garcia wins runoff election.
July 3 Felipe Calderon declares himself president-elect of Mexico.
July 30 Congo holds first democratic vote for president since 1960.
Sept. 26 Shinzo Abe wins election becoming Japan's youngest postwar prime minister.
Oct. 29 Brazil's leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva wins re-election.
Nov. 7 Leftist Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega wins back the Nicaraguan presidency.
Nov. 8 Democrats win control of U.S. House and Senate
Dec. 2 Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez wins re-election.

SOURCE: Electionguide.org

Jane Bell, Susie Hoffmann • AP

Belarus signs last-minute gas deal with Russia

MOSCOW—BELARUS SIGNED AT THE last minute a deal on Russian gas supplies to narrowly avert a threatened supply cut on Monday that would likely have hit deliveries to western Europe.

A new contract envisages a roughly fourfold increase in the price of Russian gas supplies to Belarus over the next five years, which coupled with a massive hike in Russian oil import duties effective Monday, is likely to prove a crushing blow to the economy of Belarus, traditionally one of Moscow's closest allies.

Speaking to journalists in Moscow shortly after the deal was signed, Belarussian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky did not hide his disappointment.

"The Belarussian side, in a difficult atmosphere on the eve of the New Year, signed an agreement on unfortunate terms," he said.

As part of the deal Belarus agreed to sell 50 percent of its strategically important gas pipeline operator Beltransgaz to Russian gas monopoly Gazprom, according to a breakdown of the deal provided by the Russian company.

In recent years, the Belarussian government has strenuously resisted such a sale.

Under Sunday's deal, Belarus will pay $100 for 1,000 cubic meters of gas in 2007, just below the $105 earlier demanded by Russia, but far higher than the $45 charged under the previous contract, Gazprom said in the statement.

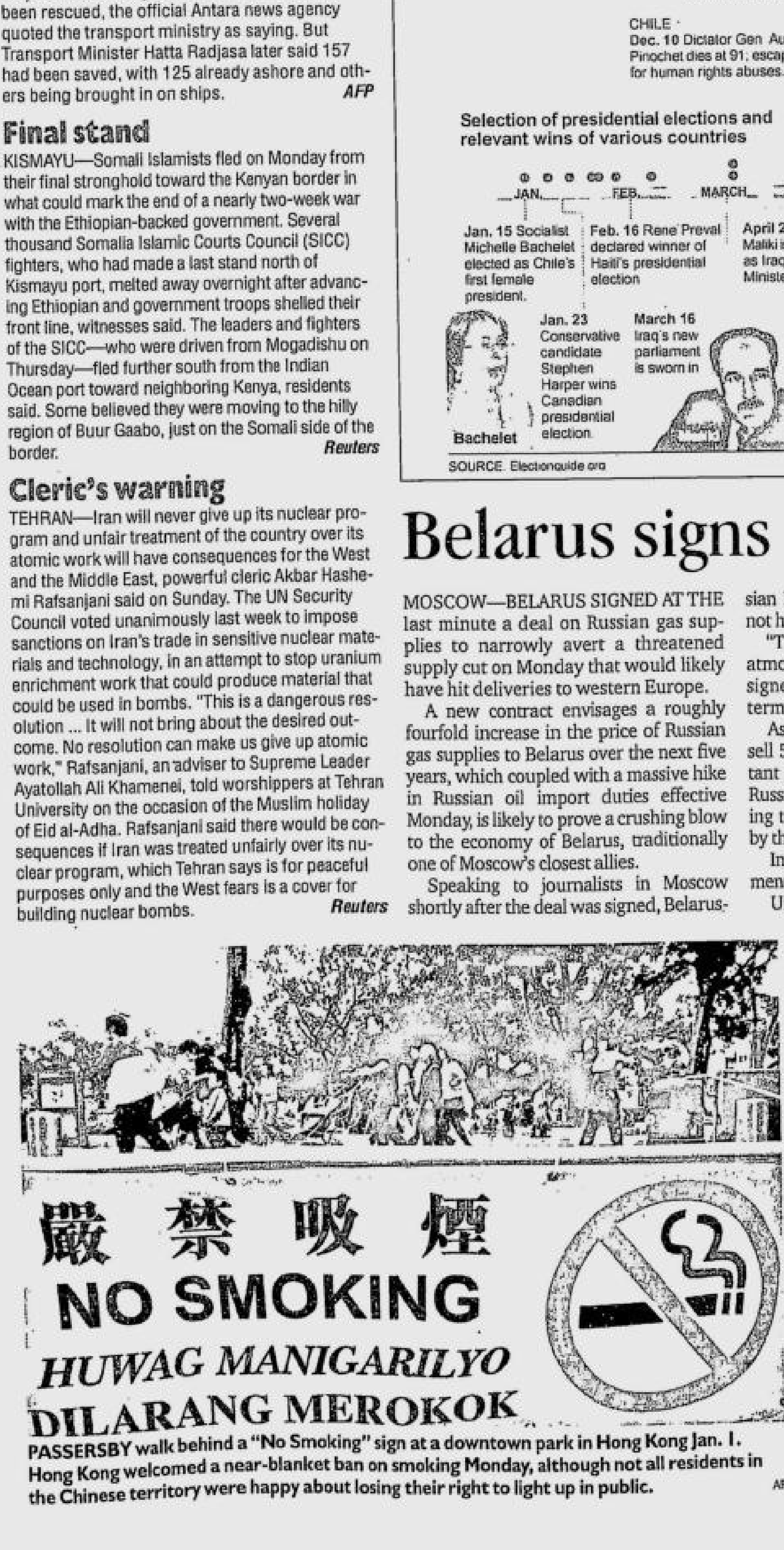
Over the five years covered by the contract, the price of gas will climb annually to reach the "market price" charged to western European customers, it said.

Most of Gazprom's EU customers pay over $200 per 1,000 cubic meters of Russian gas.

Coming in the wake of a recently announced hike in Russian duties on oil exports to Belarus, Sunday's deal appears to mark the end of an era of cheap energy supplies from Russia that have underpinned the Belarussian economy since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Speaking soon after the deal in a tense New Year's address, Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko warned that his country faced a "new economic reality."

In an apparent reference to Russia, Lukashenko spoke of "a blow to our centuries-old friendship" and called on the population to "budget more carefully." *AFP*



PASSERSBY walk behind a "No Smoking" sign at a downtown park in Hong Kong Jan. 1. Hong Kong welcomed a near-blanket ban on smoking Monday, although not all residents in the Chinese territory were happy about losing their right to light up in public. AP

Smoking ban takes effect in HK

HONG KONG—AFTER PARTYING INto the New Year, Hong Kong welcomed sweeping new laws Monday banning smoking in indoor public places, but bar and restaurant owners insist the measure is unworkable.

They risk prosecution if the ban is flouted, while smokers face on-the-spot fines of 5,000 Hong Kong dollars (US$640) if they are caught lighting up in bars, restaurants and karaoke lounges.

And in an effort to enforce the ban, the Hong Kong health department's Tobacco Control Office has sent teams of inspectors into the community.

While business leaders warned the new measure would kill off trade in Hong Kong's usually teeming bars and restaurants, people on the street gave the new law the thumbs-up.

"It means I can drink and not come out the bar stinking like an ash tray," said nonsmoker Malcolm Cook the morning after a night partying to welcome in the New Year.

At the popular Island Bar, like in many others around town, ash trays were removed at the stroke of midnight and signs were erected warning punters against smoking.

"Everyone then went outside for a drag—they all seemed to fall in line without complaint," said one reveller.

The legislation, which had been under consideration for more than a decade, was finally passed in October with huge support among lawmakers.

It is aimed not so much at curbing smoking among this seven-million strong city's estimated 900,000 smokers, but more to protect the health of the 200,000 people employed in the hospitality industry who would otherwise be exposed to second-hand smoke.

The new law applies to all indoor places of entertainment or business and some outdoor places, such as beaches.

Some 750 premises have been given temporary exemptions and may allow smoking until 2009, but the rest of the city's thousands of bars, restaurants and clubs must comply with the new law.

Despite the measure's passage, there is deep resentment among some in the hospitality industry, who warn that their businesses are at risk.

Huge street demonstrations were held during the year by bar and restaurant staff, who feared the ban would discourage regulars from their premises.

"I have no alternative but to enforce the law," said one barman at the Deli Lamma bar, a popular watering hole on Lamma Island, a small leafy isle about a mile from downtown. *AFP*

The WORLD

Editor **Luverne B. Gueco**

New Year bomb blasts grip Bangkok

BANGKOK—THAILAND GRAPPLED ON MONDAY WITH THE mystery of who ordered a series of blasts that killed three people in Bangkok, wounded 38, including nine foreigners, and ruined New Year celebrations.

The military-installed government said intelligence pointed to politicians who had lost power, not Muslim militants waging a separatist insurgency in the far south, despite similarities of style.

"We could not at this stage pinpoint which particular group was involved," said Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont, installed after a bloodless Sept. 19 coup toppled Thaksin Shinawatra, whose supporters he said might have been involved.

"Briefs from various intelligence agencies, based on evidence available, show that they came from groups that have lost political powers," Surayud told a news conference as police and soldiers mounted a major security operation.

"These were not just the previous government, but include all those which have lost power in the past," he added while refusing to say what evidence the government had.

Thaksin's lawyer called the implications a "smear campaign." Australia said it feared more attacks and joined Britain and the United States in urging their citizens to stay indoors.

"There is a possibility of further attacks in coming days," the Australian Embassy said on its Web site (www.austembassy.or.th/).

Involvement of Muslim militants, whose insurgency has cost more than 1,800 lives over the past three years but has remained confined to the far south, was a "very remote possibility," Surayud said.

Security analyst Panitan Wattanayagorn agreed, saying the bombings appeared to be politically motivated, perhaps by those facing corruption probes by the post-coup government.

"Their aim may be to destabilize the government to make sure the accusations against them are dropped or negotiated," the Chulalongkorn University lecturer told Reuters.

Since Thaksin, twice a landslide election winner, was ousted and his administration scrutinized by graft busters, several schools have been torched outside Bangkok and martial law kept in several areas because of what the army calls "undercurrents." But leading members of billionaire Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) party have denied it is involved in any form of violent resistance to the coup. *Reuters*

MEMBERS of a Thai bomb squad unit inspect the damage at a bus stop caused by a bomb that exploded near Bangkok's Victory Monument in Bangkok, Dec. 31. AFP

Ban Ki-Moon

The new UN Secretary General

Jun 13 1944	Born in North Chungcheong province, South Korea
1970	Graduates from Seoul National University with degree in international relations
1978-1980	First secretary at South Korea's UN mission
1980-1983	Director of United Nations bureau at the South Korean foreign ministry
1985	Finishes post-graduate studies at Harvard University
2001-2002	South Korea's chief envoy to the UN
2004	Becomes South Korea's foreign minister
Oct 13 2006	Chosen as successor to UN chief Kofi Annan
Jan 1 2007	Takes over as new head of UN

Source: AFP/Korea MOFAT 010106 AFP

Sokor's Ban Ki-moon takes over as UN chief

UNITED NATIONS—BAN KI-moon of South Korea takes over as UN secretary general Monday, facing numerous crises across the globe as well as the challenging task of reforming the United Nations itself.

The 62-year-old diplomat's handling of the reform, launched in 2005 by his predecessor Kofi Annan, will be closely watched by UN members, notably the most powerful, the United States, which strongly backed his candidacy.

Washington and others want the UN to become more efficient and transparent and be stricter over ethics and management following a series of scandals, including in the corruption-tainted Iraq oil-for-food program.

Aware of the huge task ahead of him, Ban said in a news conference in December that he wanted to "restore trust" in the United Nations.

In subsequent interviews, he promised to devote most of his attention to solving the immediate problem of regional conflicts around the world.

He said he wanted to be a "harmoniser" and a "bridge-builder," pointing out that the conflict in the Middle East, the Lebanese situation and the crisis in Darfur would be among his priorities.

White House spokesman Scott Stanzel said Sunday that Ban assumes his new role at a time of great challenge and opportunity at the United Nations.

"The United States will rely on his leadership to help steer the UN Organization through the reforms already underway, and to propel the Organization even further on the path of reform," Stanzel noted. *AFP*

Saddam fed birds, seldom complained—nurse

ST. LOUIS—A MILITARY NURSE who cared for Saddam Hussein in jail said the deposed dictator saved bread crusts to feed birds and seldom complained to his captors, except when he had legitimate gripes.

Master Sgt. Robert Ellis cared for the former Iraqi dictator from January 2004 until August 2005 at Camp Cropper, the compound near Baghdad where Saddam and other "high value detainees" were held.

Ellis, 56, an operating room nurse in the St. Louis suburb of St. Charles, said he was ordered to do whatever was needed to keep Saddam alive.

"That was my job: to keep him alive and healthy, so they could kill him at a later date," he told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch for a story published Sunday. Saddam was executed Saturday.

MASTER Sgt. Robert Ellis AP

Ellis checked on Saddam twice a day and wrote a daily report on Saddam's physical and emotional condition.

Saddam told Ellis that cigars and coffee kept his blood pressure down, and it seemed to work. Saddam would insist that Ellis smoke with him.

Ellis said Saddam did not complain much, and, when he did, his complaint was usually legitimate. "He had very good coping skills," Ellis said.

Saddam shared with Ellis memories of happier times when his children were young. The former dictator described telling the youngsters bedtime stories and giving his daughter half a Tums tablet when she had a stomachache.

When he was allowed short visits outside, Saddam would feed the birds crusts of bread saved from his meals. He also watered a dusty plot of weeds.

"He said he was a farmer when he was young and he never forgot where he came from," Ellis said.

When Ellis told Saddam he had to leave for America because his brother was dying, Saddam hugged him and said he would be Ellis' brother.

"I was there to help him, and he respected that," Ellis said.

Saddam never discussed dying and expressed no regrets about his rule. *AP*

Americans pay respects to late president Ford

WASHINGTON—AMERICANS paid their last respects Sunday to former president Gerald Ford, who was praised by former aides and lawmakers for offering steady leadership after the Watergate scandal.

Ordinary Americans filed past Ford's flag-draped casket in the Congress building's Rotunda after being greeted by one of the late president's sons, Jack.

Ford died in California on Dec. 26 at the age of 93, and will lie in state in the US Capitol Rotunda until Tuesday.

Vice President Dick Cheney, who served as Ford's chief of staff, delivered a speech Saturday evening hailing Ford for his most criticized decision—pardoning his predecessor Richard Nixon.

Cheney told mourners the former president "was almost alone in understanding that there can be no healing without pardon." During a time of "great malice" following Nixon's resignation in 1974, Cheney said Ford's decision saved the country from division and disaster.

In September 1974, Ford delivered an unconditional pardon for any crimes Nixon may have committed, a move that Nixon's opponents viewed as unjust and led to speculation that a deal had been cut beforehand.

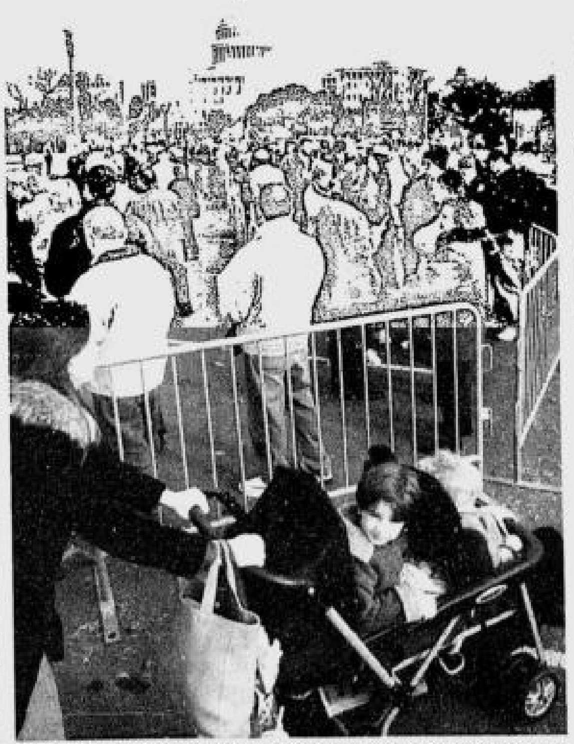
President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush will view the casket at the Capitol on Monday. The series of solemn tributes to Ford will conclude with a national day of mourning on Tuesday and a service at the National Cathedral.

The outgoing Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dennis Hastert, said Ford provided a steady hand at a difficult moment in history.

"We needed a healer. We needed a rock. We needed honesty, candor, and courage. We needed Gerald Ford," Hastert told mourners.

In keeping with his family's wishes, the funeral services scheduled for the 38th president will be more muted than those for former president Ronald Reagan two years ago, when a horse-drawn caisson carried Reagan's body through the streets of the capital.

On Wednesday, Ford's remains are to be laid to rest at the Gerald Ford Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan. *AFP*


VISITORS wait in line to pay their last respects to former US President Gerald Ford as his body lies in state in the rotunda of the US Capitol in Washington, Dec. 31. REUTERS

US military deaths in Iraq reach 3,000

WASHINGTON—THE US MILITARY death toll in Iraq has reached 3,000, an unwelcome milestone for President George W. Bush who is searching for a way to turn around the unpopular war even if it means sending more troops.

The Web site, www.icasualties.org, on Sunday listed the death of Spec. Dustin R. Donica, 22, on Dec. 28 as previously unreported and said his death, together with that of an unidentified soldier killed by a roadside bomb in Baghdad on Saturday, brought the toll to 3,000.

The mark was reached as Bush weighs options, including a short-term increase in forces of up to 30,000, to help control the deteriorating situation in Iraq where daily violence plagues Baghdad and much of the country.

"Every loss is regretted and there is no special significance to the overall number of casualties," Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Mark Ballesteros said.

Analysts called 3,000 deaths a major personal tragedy but said it had limited political and military significance.

Anti-war activists vowed to use the milestone as a catalyst to press for the withdrawal of US forces.

US and Iraqi troops have failed to establish security in Iraq's capital, despite concentrating efforts there, as battles among Sunni and Shiite Muslim militias, insurgents and government forces as well as al Qaida fighters rage.

Bush, at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, mourned the death of the 3,000th US soldier, the White House said, but cautioned war-weary Americans that no quick end to the war was in sight.

The president has been under pressure to change course in Iraq amid widespread public and political discontent. He is expected to unveil his new strategy early next month but has rejected the idea of a timetable for pulling out the 134,000 US troops now in the country. *Reuters*

Former communist states Bulgaria, Romania join EU

BUCHAREST—FORMER COMmunist states Bulgaria and Romania made it into the European Union on Monday, a historic moment that drew thousands to midnight concerts although leaders warned that painful reforms were still needed.

As midnight struck in Alexander Battenberg square in the Bulgarian capital Sofia, hundreds of balloons with "Welcome Europe" written on them rose to the sky from a 30,000-strong crowd.

The addition of the two former Soviet bloc states brought the number of EU nations to 27 and gave the bloc a total population of almost half a billion people.

In a video message to both capitals, EU Commission President Jose Manuel Durao Barroso said: "In welcoming two new members in the family, we know our culture, our heritage, will be richer, our mutual ties and our economy will be boosted." Slovenia meanwhile, which had joined the EU in 2004, became at midnight there the first former communist state to adopt the EU's common currency, the euro.

British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett hailed Romania and Bulgaria's "great achievement" and said the two countries would bring "their own particular contributions" to the EU.

But the British popular press has raised fears that Romanian and Bulgarian criminals could use the opportunity of open borders among EU states to come to Britain.

Bulgaria and Romania's road to EU accession has been long, with repeated calls from Brussels for the two nations to crack down on corruption and organized crime in order to guarantee a properly working market economy.

EU headquarters will be keeping a close eye on whether the two nations continue with reforms and possibly cut aid if they do not.

But the mood overnight was full of celebration in the two new EU states.

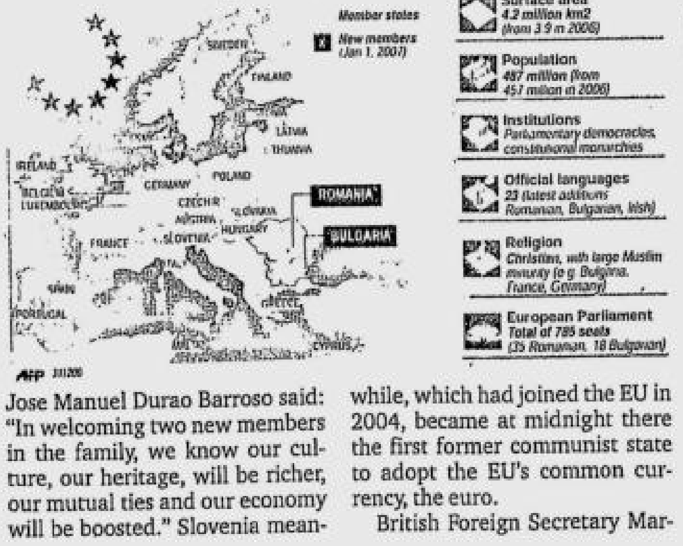
Romanian Prime Minister Calin Tariceanu spoke of "a reason to rejoice, a moment expected for 17 years" since the fall of communism in 1989.

Spectacular sound and light shows flooded the centers of Sofia and Bucharest, culminating on the stroke of midnight in a blaze of the EU's colors, blue and gold.

The sky exploded with fireworks and cascades of gold EU stars.

The hearts of both cities were a seething mass of revellers wearing tinsel and woolly hats and dancing to gigantic pop concerts. *AFP*

The European Union expands


Member states
New members (Jan 1, 2007)
SWEDEN
FINLAND
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
IRELAND
BELGIUM
LUXEMBOURG
GERMANY
POLAND
CZECH R.
AUSTRIA
SLOVAKIA
HUNGARY
SLOVENIA
FRANCE
SPAIN
PORTUGAL
GREECE
CYPRUS
ROMANIA
BULGARIA
Surface area
4.2 million km2 (from 3.9 m 2006)
Population
487 million (from 451 million in 2006)
Institutions
Parliamentary democracies, constitutional monarchies
Official languages
23 (latest additions Romanian, Bulgarian, Irish)
Religion
Christian, with large Muslim minority (e.g. Bulgaria, France, Germany)
European Parliament
Total of 785 seats (35 Romanian, 18 Bulgarian)

AFP 311206

WHAT'S INSIDE

Molina far from reaching peak form /A22

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SPORTS

Editor **Teddyvic S. Melendres**

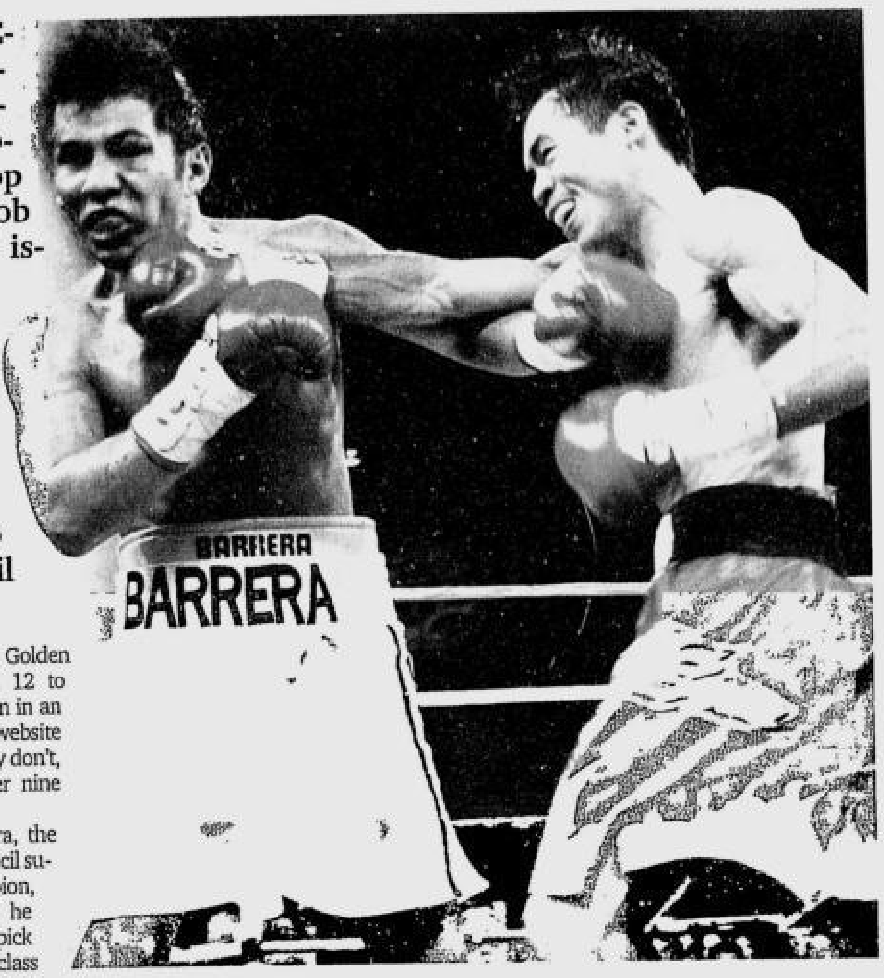
Text us your feedback: inquirer sprt name/age/city/message to 2207 (Globe) or 283 (Smart)

Nash fires 35 as Suns nip Pistons/A23

FIGHT PACQUIAO

Arum issues deadline to Barrera

THE MANNY PACquiao-Marco Antonio Barrera rematch fast slipping away, Top Rank boss Bob Arum yesterday issued his own deadline for the Mexican champion and his promoter to agree to a $2.5 million offer to face the Filipino ring icon on April 28 in Las Vegas.



MANNY Pacquiao punishes Marco Antonio Barrera in their non-title fight in San Antonio, Texas in 2003 where the Filipino stopped the Mexican in the 11th round. The Filipino ring icon wants a rematch with Barrera, now the reigning WBC super featherweight champion, but a promotional tug-of-war between Golden Boy Promotions, which handles the Mexican fighter, and Bob Arum's Top Rank outfit, threatens the eagerly awaited showdown. FILE PHOTO

"We're giving Barrera and Golden Boy Promotions until Jan. 12 to make a deal," declared Arum in an interview with the ring website Boxingtalk yesterday. "If they don't, we'll move on to the other nine (possible) opponents."

Arum said that if Barrera, the reigning World Boxing Council super featherweight champion, fails to meet the deadline, he plans to have Pacquiao pick from among nine world-class talents on his list for a fight in Macau on April 28.

Arum's deadline came amid reports from the United States that a Barrera-Juan Manuel Marquez battle on March 17 is all but sealed, leaving Pacquiao with no marquee name to fight in the early part of 2007.

A top official of the World Boxing Organization who is in Cebu finalizing details of the proposed World Cup pitting Filipino fighters against their Mexican counterparts early this year also confirmed that a Barrera-Marquez fight is a done deal.

Earlier, GBP chief executive officer Richard Schaefer also imposed a deadline for Pacquiao to decide until today whether or not to accept a 50-50 offer to face Barrera on March 17.

The GBP executive had refused to deal with Arum, saying the 75-year-old promoter does not have any promotional rights over Pacquiao.

Under GBP's terms, Pacquiao would also get a share of pay-per-view revenues, as well as exclusive television rights in the Philippines not just for his fight, but for all Golden Boy-promoted events in the future.

But Arum stressed, in another interview with Boxing Confidential, that Schaefer does not have the clout to impose a deadline on Pacquiao.

"Look, Schaefer and no one else is imposing any deadline on Manny Pacquiao," Arum said. "The attraction in that fight is Manny. It's not Barrera and they know it.

"They know what the PPV numbers are. What's Barrera going to do if he does not fight Manny? He will never fight Marquez, you can be sure of that."

Arum said he knows "the numbers" because he promoted three fights between Barrera and Morales.

The promoter said that in Barrera's last fight, the show only did 150,000 pay-per-view buy, indicating that the fighter does not have the strong Mexican following that Morales enjoyed.

"Barrera is Barrera and he does not do 350,000 or 400,000 PPV buys like Manny and Erik did last Nov. 18," Arum said.

"With Barrera, if you do 250,000 to 300,000 PPV buys, it is a big deal. So they have to decide if they want to fight Manny because, under the WBC rules, if Barrera does not fight Manny, then he must fight (Hector) Soto."

Arum also promotes Soto, who he said "will knock Barrera out."

He said Macau businessman Steve Wynn wants him to bring Pacquiao to the former Portuguese enclave to fight an opponent ranked in the Top 10.

"Steve wants to Manny to fight either in April or in September," Arum said. "He can't fight Donald Duck but he can fight any Top 10 guy."

Pacquiao had already expressed preference to go after the crown of Barrera, whom he stopped in a non-title bout in 2003 in Texas.

But the rematch is in peril in the face of the promotional tug-of-war between GBP and Arum's Top Rank outfit.

The conflict started when Pacquiao signed with GBP last September when he went to the US to prepare for his third fight with Morales. Shortly after beating Morales, Pacquiao announced he was sticking it out with Arum and confirmed the partnership early last week. *Salven L. Lagumbay, Contributor*

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Kettle Korn-UST cagers unfazed by rocky debut

By Jasmine W. Payo

IT HAD BEEN A ROCKY DEbut for the Kettle Korn-UST Tigers in the PBL Silver Cup.

But main man Jojo Duncil has reason to start the year with high hopes even if the Tigers are winless in seven starts.

"At least we're improving," Duncil said in Filipino. "We're no longer losing by a big margin, we're keeping it close."

Duncil, the Finals Most Valuable Player in the Tigers' UAAP title run, said that the absence of a veteran slotman had been hurting the team's chances.

"We don't have experienced big men like the other teams," he said. "But coach Pido (Jarencio) didn't really recruit big players because he's giving our big men a chance to develop."

From the start, Jarencio had no illusion of a strong start. Although the Tigers ruled the UAAP, the rookie mentor notes that the PBL is a tougher league.

Just like the Tigers, the Magnolia Spinners, bannered by the core of NCAA champion San Beda, have been struggling in the tournament.

The Spinners are just slightly better off than the Tigers with a 2-6 record.

"We have to adjust to the kind of game in the PBL," said Jarencio.

Duncil adds that the Tigers have one of the youngest rosters.

"It's harder for us because a lot of our players in our team are playing in the league for the first time," said Duncil. "We want to win, but we're also here to get more experience."

Despite the Tigers' alarming skid, Duncil has kept his own game in high gear.

The 6-foot-1 swingman averages 16.29 points per game, less than a point behind scoring leader Ken Bono of Cebuana Lhuillier-Pera Padala (17 ppg).

No other Kettle Korn player, however, is norming in double figures.

Allan Evangelista, Anthony Espiritu, June Cortez and Dylan Ababou, the core of the UAAP champion team, have yet to deliver their usual numbers.

"We're learning and I think we're starting to adjust," said Duncil.

Kettle Korn-UST will resume its campaign versus Mail and More at 2 p.m. on Saturday at the Olivarez College Sports Center in Parañaque.

In the second game, Hapee-PCU will battle Harbour Centre at 4 p.m.

Henkel Sista leads the nine-team field with a 6-2 card, followed by Mail and More and Hapee-PCU with similar 5-2 slates.

STANDINGS	W	L
Henkel Sista	6	2
Mail and More	5	2
Hapee-PCU	5	2
TeleTech	4	3
Toyota Otis	4	3
Harbour Centre	4	3
CL-Pera Padala	3	5
Magnolia	2	6
Kettle Korn	0	7

GAMES SATURDAY
(*Olivarez Sports Center*)
2 p.m.—Mail and More vs Kettle Korn-UST
4 p.m.—Hapee-PCU vs Harbour Centre

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Rosales undecided on WC stint

By Jong Arcano
Editor, Inquirer Golf Monthly

JENNIFER ROSALES STARTS HER BUILDUP FOR THE 2007 LPGA SEASON with coach Gerard Cantada today, hoping to find the missing link to a complete swing transformation that was the main cause of her struggling campaign last year.

Even though "J-Ro" will have a lot of time to correct her game before the first official tournament of the LPGA slated in mid-February, she may have to decide quickly on her participation in the Women's World Cup of Golf in Sun City, South Africa.

The Philippines, one of the 22 countries tipped to compete in the World Cup on Jan. 19-21 at the Gary Player Country Club, will be represented by Rosales and Dorothy Delasin again.

They almost won the inaugural World Cup in 2004 but failed to compete last year.

As of yesterday, however, Rosales remained undecided on her World Cup stint.

Aside from the long travel time of at least 24 hours that kept her from competing last year, Rosales' mother Lourdes told the INQUIRER yesterday that a corporate outing with top executives of a big Hong Kong firm runs smack with the World Cup schedule.

"The corporate outing might interfere and at this point, it's really all up to Jenny," said the elder Rosales, adding that her daughter's elder sister, Michelle, who now acts as her manager is still finalizing negotiations.

Cantada said that while he remains confident Rosales will be able to play in the World Cup, he has yet to be informed of the final decision.

"It's one of the things that we'll have to talk about when we start our training tomorrow," Cantada said.

"If she'll ask me, I would really recommend that she plays the World Cup."

Wack Wack, the club where Cantada grew up in and where he's now one of its teaching professionals, has allowed Rosales free use of the facilities for her training. It also gives her closer access to a new training venue since her home is just 20 minutes or less away.

Cantada believes that Rosales has reached about 80 percent of her effectivity with the new swing.

"It's really more on getting really confident with it, but we're getting there and our continuous training will also help a lot," he said.

When Rosales played in the Lexus Cup in Singapore two weeks ago, she was able to show better ball striking against Sheri Steinhauer in singles play, although she struggled with her short game.

Rosales and her Asian teammates beat the the International team, a feat that won her a fat paycheck of $50,000, her biggest for 2006.

ROSALES: Her coach wants her to play.

Asiad debacle is water under bridge for Molina

By Jasmine W. Payo

HE MAY BE THE MOST DECorated national swimmer in recent years, but Miguel Molina believes he has the potential to do better.

"I was told that male swimmers reach their peak at 24 or 25, so I haven't reached my peak yet," the US-based Molina said, a week after arriving in Manila.

While on vacation, the 22-year-old tanker could not resist taking a dip in the pool.

"I'm still swimming while I'm here; still training just to keep in shape," he said.

Just last year, though, Molina thought that there could be more to life than swimming.

Fourth-place finish

"I took a break last March and only got back in August," he said. "It was good I took a break. It made me realize that I wanted to continue swimming. It helped me refocus."

Molina returned to action last December in the Asian Games in Doha, Qatar. And despite four months of training, he only managed a fourth-place finish in the men's 400-meter individual medley. But that proved to be best finish for the Philippine swimming contingent.

"I didn't do well as I hoped in Doha," said Molina. "But I'm happy with my performance considering the short training I had."

Strong showing

Molina is preparing for the World Championship in Melbourne, Australia, in March and the Japan Open in August. He's also hoping for another strong showing in the Southeast Asian Games in Thailand by the end of the year.

In the 2005 SEA Games, Molina emerged as the most bemedaled Filipino with three individual golds and a silver, plus a bronze in the team event.

"At the start of the year, I'll be joining several warm-up meets in the US," he said. "But what I'm really looking forward to is the World Championship and the SEA Games."

Fil-Am bet Jackie Pangilinan is expected to join Molina in the World Championship.

Pangilinan will be back in the national team after skipping the Doha Asian Games to focus on her studies in Harvard.

Harvard arrangement

But the 19-year-old swimmer will first see action in the US NCAA swimming competition in February, before joining the national squad in March.

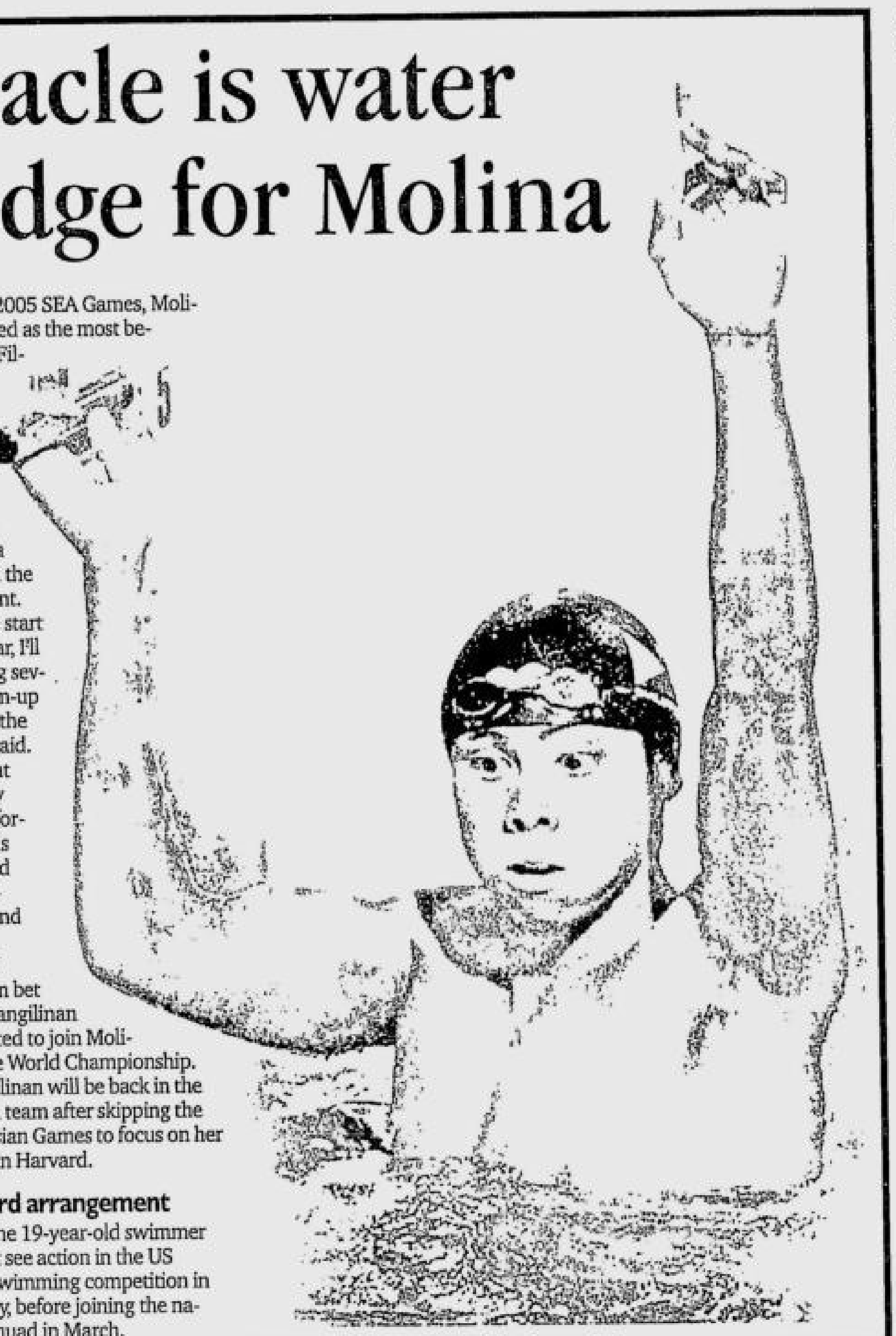
"It was an arrangement with Harvard that she must represent her school in the college swimming competition," Pangilinan's father, Florante, confirmed earlier. "We have to do this so Jackie can be released for the 2007 Southeast Asian Games."

Molina is also hoping to finish his international relations studies at the University of California-Berkeley.

"I'm graduating in May," said Molina, who will be leaving for the United States on Tuesday.

But there are certainly more lessons to learn in the pool.

"I learned a lot the past year, how to train and other different aspects," noted Molina. "I also have to work on other things, like I need to improve on my mental preparation for the races."



MIGUEL Molina is still looking for peak form. EDWIN BACASMAS

Gonzalez manager says Peñalosa fight in RP 'very risky'

By Salven L. Lagumbay
Contributor

THE CAMP OF WORLD BOXING Organization bantamweight champion Jhonny Gonzalez has expressed apprehension over the possibility of defending the title in the Philippines against Gerry Peñalosa during the Mexico-RP World Cup of boxing slated March 17.

In a report posted at the boxing website Fightnews, Gonzalez's manager Oswaldo Kuchle said that a fight between the two warriors is unlikely. He said that since his boxer is the champion, he should not be able to prove anything by fighting in his challenger's hometown.

"Jhonny is the champion and should not have to prove anything by going to the challenger's house," said Kuchle. "A lot of Mexicans have lost their titles by bad decisions in the Philippines."

Gonzalez's camp added that they would prefer to wait for a rematch with Israel Vasquez or a showdown with IBF bantamweight king Rafael Marquez.

Gonzalez had previously lost to Vasquez in a thrilling bout that saw both men hit the canvas.

The Gonzalez-Peñalosa bout is one of the three world title match-ups being planned for the World Cup, which will be co-promoted by Oscar De la Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions and the ALA-SGG group of Tony Aldeguer and Sammy Gelloani.

The two other match-ups will pit WBO superbantam champ Daniel Ponce de Leon against Rey "Boom Boom" Bautista and WBO superfly champ Fernando Montiel versus Z Gorres.

Peñalosa is slated to fly to Japan next week to be at ringside when his protege Michael Farenas sees action on January 13 in Tokyo, and then fly to Los Angeles right after the fight.

SPORTSWATCH

Guevara golf this Friday at Wack Wack

MERCEDES BENZ AND TOYOTA CARS AWAIT PARTICIPANTS WHO WILL score aces during the 7th Domingo M. Guevara Sr. Memorial golf tournament this Friday at Wack Wack's east course in Mandaluyong City. Tournament director Benjie Guevara said that a brand-new Mercedes Benz B class sedan donated by Cats Motors' Felix Ang will be the hole-in-one prize on the par-3 No. 8 hole. A hole-in-one on No. 16 will earn for the participant a brand-new Toyota sedan donated by Toyota Pasong Tamo's Art Macapagal. Tee-off will start at 6 a.m. and end at 12:30 p.m. Award rites, raffle draws and other fellowship activities will be held at the poolside beginning at 6 p.m. For inquiries, call the tournament director at 0915-7572424. The annual tournament is being held in memory of the late industrialist and golfer Domingo M. Guevara Sr.

Fistorama features amateur fighters

THE BOXING PROGRAM "FISTORAMA" FEATURES THIS AFTERNOON top amateurs on RPN-9 in its new time slot starting at 3 p.m. every Tuesday. The amateur bouts are part of the 1st Joe Cantada Open Amateur Boxing Championships at the Cantada Sports Center in Bagumbayan, Taguig City. The finals were held at the air-conditioned ballroom of the Cantada Sports Center. Fistorama is shown worldwide twice weekly through ABS-CBN Global's The Filipino Channel/Pinoy Central TV. The longest running local TV sports program, "Golf Power Plus," airs at 4 p.m. featuring the start of the championship match between College of St. Benilde Team 1, and St. Francis of Assisi College in the PCSO Women's Inter-Collegiate Beach Volleyball Challenge. Golf Power Plus is likewise aired worldwide.

BEST basketball classes start Jan. 6

MILO BEST CENTER KICKS OFF ITS SATURDAY-ONLY CLASSES FOR THE year on Jan. 6 at the Ateneo College covered courts and San Beda College. Level 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 sessions will be conducted at Ateneo from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m., while level 1, 2, and 3 classes will be staged at San Beda from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday-only classes will also start on Jan. 13 at the Xavier School Sports Complex in Greenhills, San Juan. BEST Center's experienced coaches will conduct level 1, 2 and 3 clinics from 1 to 4 p.m. For inquiries, call The BEST Center at 411-6260 and 372-3065.

First derby of 2007 at Roligon today

WHO WILL BE THE FIRST COCKFIGHT DERBY CHAMPION OF 2007? Roligon Mega Cockpit presents the 152-entry Noche Buena 5-Cock Derby at 5 p.m. today, with 78 fights on tap. All set to field their winningest breeds in the derby backed by Lakpue Drug Inc. and Thunderbird Enertone are Boy Tatco of Pasig, Aris Jabson, Boyet Luna, Butch Nunez, Danny Legazpi, Ed Bacul,Lito Garcia, Johnny Elorde, Ronnel Agustin, Leo Magpantay, Lito Uy of Marikina, Romy and Mon Torres of Taguig, Benny Lim and Flor Mallari of Tarlac, Frank Cabaddu, Dan and Art Lacsina of Pampanga, Jim Wolfe and John Sabin of Bataan, Glen Boody of Pateros, Rep. Amado Estrella, Mark JM Scat, Tony Jaen, Nonoy Gonzales, Master Romero, Roy Dumandan and Sam Mendoza. The winners stand to receive a guaranteed prize of P1.2 million for an entry fee of P7,700, said hosts Ronnie Lacsina and Doc Tuazon. The second elimination round is on Thursday while the 3-cock finals sizzle on Jan. 6. For reservation of cockhouses, call 851-2275, 833-1638 or 0918-9001411.

Overseas training for triathlon standouts

ELITE TRIATHLETES WILL COMPETE AND train abroad as the Philippines seeks podium finishes in triathlon and duathlon events of the 2007 Southeast Asian Games in Thailand.

Duathlon, which saw national champion Ryan Mendoza emerge as Asian champion, and aquathlon will also have their own share of races to complement the schedule of triathlon events, said Triathlon Association of the Philippines (Trap) president Tom Carrasco.

Carrasco told a recent planning session with Trap officials that emphasis this year will still be on nationwide talent search program.

"Young as we are as an NSA and faced with a dearth of local talents, we have a lot of work to do to develop triathlon," said Carrasco.

CARRASCO

The Trap head also announced the appointment of Rick Reyes and former national champion Ani de Leon as full-time handlers of the junior triathlon program.

He added that a junior training camp in Subic will be held in July. The camp will be supported by the International Triathlon Union, the Asian Triathlon Confederation and triathlon's international sponsor British Gas.

The schedule of races this year will be highlighted by the National Triathlon Championship on Feb. 18 at the Lakeshore in Mexico, Pampanga, the Subic International Triathlon on May 5-6, the O2 Long Distance Triathlon, also in Subic in July, and the nationwide Speedo National Age Group Triathlon (NAGT) series.

The NAGT series will have legs in Clearwater Clark, Davao, Danao, Cagayan de Oro, Los Baños, The Lakeshore in Pampanga, and in Ayala-Alabang, Muntinlupa.

Reyes has also been tasked to assist ITU Sports Development director Libby Burrell and other international coaches in conducting a new Level 1 coaches' accreditation seminar, the second for Asian coaches, also in Subic in July.

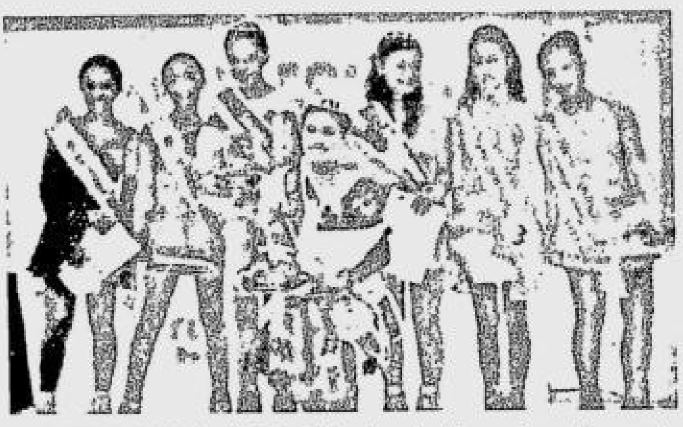
Final elims for chess players bound for US, Asia meets up

THE SECOND AND LAST ELIMINAtion tournament for members of the Milo Checkmate team bound for competitions in the United States and Asia kicks off at 10:15 a.m. tomorrow at the St. Francis Square, behind SM Megamall, in Mandaluyong City.

Open to all enrollees of the Milo Checkmate clinic who took up at least two series last year, the competition will be divided into four categories: 8-under, 10-under, 12-under and juniors (13-17 years old).

The winners in each group will advance to the finals and will play in a round-robin format along with the first group of qualifiers, including Marie Antoniette Sandiego and Carlo Caranyagan (8-under); Vincent Joseph Fuerte, Mary Joyce Fuerte and Jose Marti Caniones (10-under); Claudio Olar Jr., Kenneth Co and Tristan Dandan (12-under) and Adrian Co (juniors).

Meanwhile, Richard Villaseran of La Salle beat Ronald Llavanes in the final round to rule the MCC 2000-below active chess tournament at SFS over the weekend. Villaseran and Llavanes tied at the top with identical 5.0 points after six rounds.



BEAUTIES ON ICE: Leslie Peña-Ching (front) with members of her court after her selection as Ice Princess at the SM Mall of Asia recently. Judges based the scores of the candidates on their ice skating form, talent and personality. The 15-year-old Peña-Ching bested first runner-upVerniecce Enciso of Las Piñas, third placer Anna Isabell Villafuerte and four others.

RACING

BY TOP CHOICE

Race 1—(Qrt/Tri)—Beautiful Jaeda (2), Magic Bullet (4), Master Professor (5), Loaded (3)

Race 2—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Untouchable (2), Boss UFO Naman (4), Sun And Wind (4), Ray Moon Star (3), Barako (9)

Race 3—(Qrt/Tri)—Field Star/Kim Possible (1), Silent Operator/King's Choice (6), Speed Admiral (2), Lucky Punch (5)

Race 4—(Super 6/Qrt/Tri)—Hot Shower (12), EJ Forever (3), Magic Cue (7), Magic Key (8), Soaring High (9), Grey Angel (5)

Race 5—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Calvin's Magic (7), Common Goal (1), Mika's Pride (9), Rock Attack Attack (5), Hard Way (6)

Race 6—(Super 6/Qrt/Tri)—Eskapo (9), Storm Hall (6), Kai Jason (5), Valid Hazm (7), Golden Song (11), Bloodline (4)

Race 7—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Cash Mc Call (10), All Class (6), Play It Again (1), Cast Away (9) Astimegoesby (5)

Race 8—(Super 6/Qrt/Tri)—Step On The Gas (6), Karma (10), Luck Of The Irish (12), Striker (1), Virgin Hill (2), Donna Messier (13)

NBA ROUNDUP

Suns nip Pistons as Nash fires 35

AUBURN HILLS, MICH.—STEVE NASH HAD 35 POINTS AND 12 assists and Amare Stoudemire added a season-high 31 points and 13 rebounds to lead the Phoenix Suns to a 108-101 victory over the Detroit Pistons on Sunday.

Nash took advantage of point guard Chauncey Billups' absence to help hand Detroit its third straight loss. Billups is expected to miss two weeks after straining a calf muscle at the end of Friday's one-point loss to Indiana.

After the Pistons erased a 10-point deficit in the fourth quarter, Nash hit consecutive jumpers to put Phoenix back ahead, 95-91, with 4:10 to play.

The Pistons got within 101-99 on Carlos Delfino's layup with 1:39 left, but he missed a potential go-ahead 3-pointer on the next possession, and Nash's three-point play put the game away.

Richard Hamilton scored 31 points for Detroit and Flip Murray, getting more minutes in place of Billups, set season highs of 18 points and seven assists.

Spurs 95, Hawks 81

At San Antonio, Tony Parker scored 27 points and Tim Duncan added 17 despite playing with the stomach flu that has pestered the San Antonio roster the past week.

It was Parker's third straight game scoring more than 20 points and fourth of five.

Manu Ginobili, who missed a game this week due to stomach flu, scored 18 for San Antonio, which opened the fourth quarter with a 10-0 run that gave it a 77-61 lead.

Joe Johnson scored 23 points for the Hawks (9-20), who have lost seven straight and 11 of 12. Atlanta has lost nine straight in San Antonio dating to Feb. 15, 1997.

Lakers 104, 76ers 94

At Los Angeles, Kobe Bryant had 35 points, eight rebounds and six assists, and Los Angeles overcame another injury to starting center Kwame Brown.

The Lakers were leading, 56-48, early in the third quarter when Brown was helped to the dressing room because of a severely sprained left ankle.

Kyle Korver had a season-high 29 points and grabbed eight rebounds for the 76ers, who have lost 19 of their last 23 games and 14 of 16 on the road.

Clippers 90, Knicks 80

At Los Angeles, Elton Brand scored 32 points and tied his career high with eight blocked shots to lead Los Angeles.

Chris Kaman had 13 rebounds for the Clippers, who have won four of their last five games following a six-game losing streak. The victory was their fourth straight over New York and eighth in the last 11 meetings.

Eddy Curry had 15 points for the Knicks, who are 0-8 against the Clippers at Staples Center.

Rookie guard Mardy Collins returned to the Knicks' lineup after serving a six-game suspension and scored 11 points in 22 minutes. It was Collins' flagrant foul against Denver's J.R. Smith that triggered a brawl at Madison Square Garden Dec. 16.

SuperSonics 101, Celtics 95

At Seattle, Chris Wilcox scored a season-high 24 points, and Damien Wilkins added 20 for the SuperSonics.

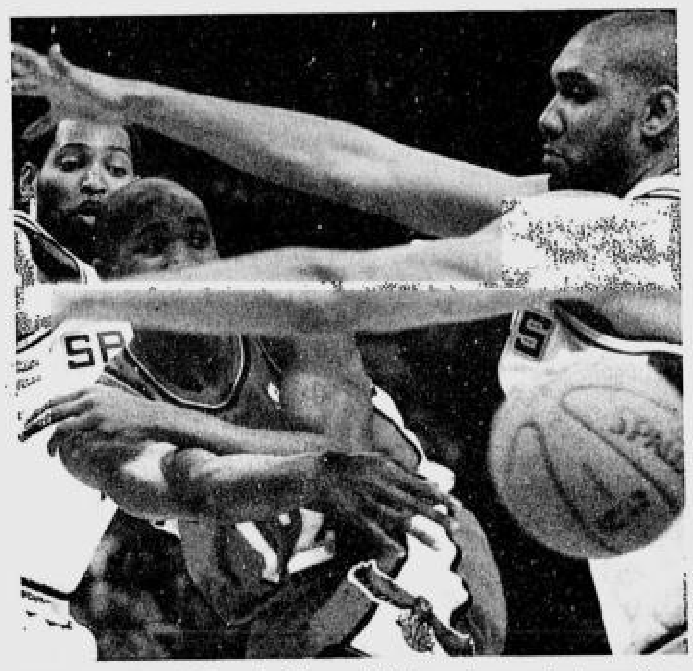
Ray Allen, Seattle's leading scorer, was 7-of-20 from the floor for just 15 points after having a season-low 14 Friday night in a loss to Minnesota. Tony Allen had 23 points for the Celtics in their sixth straight loss.

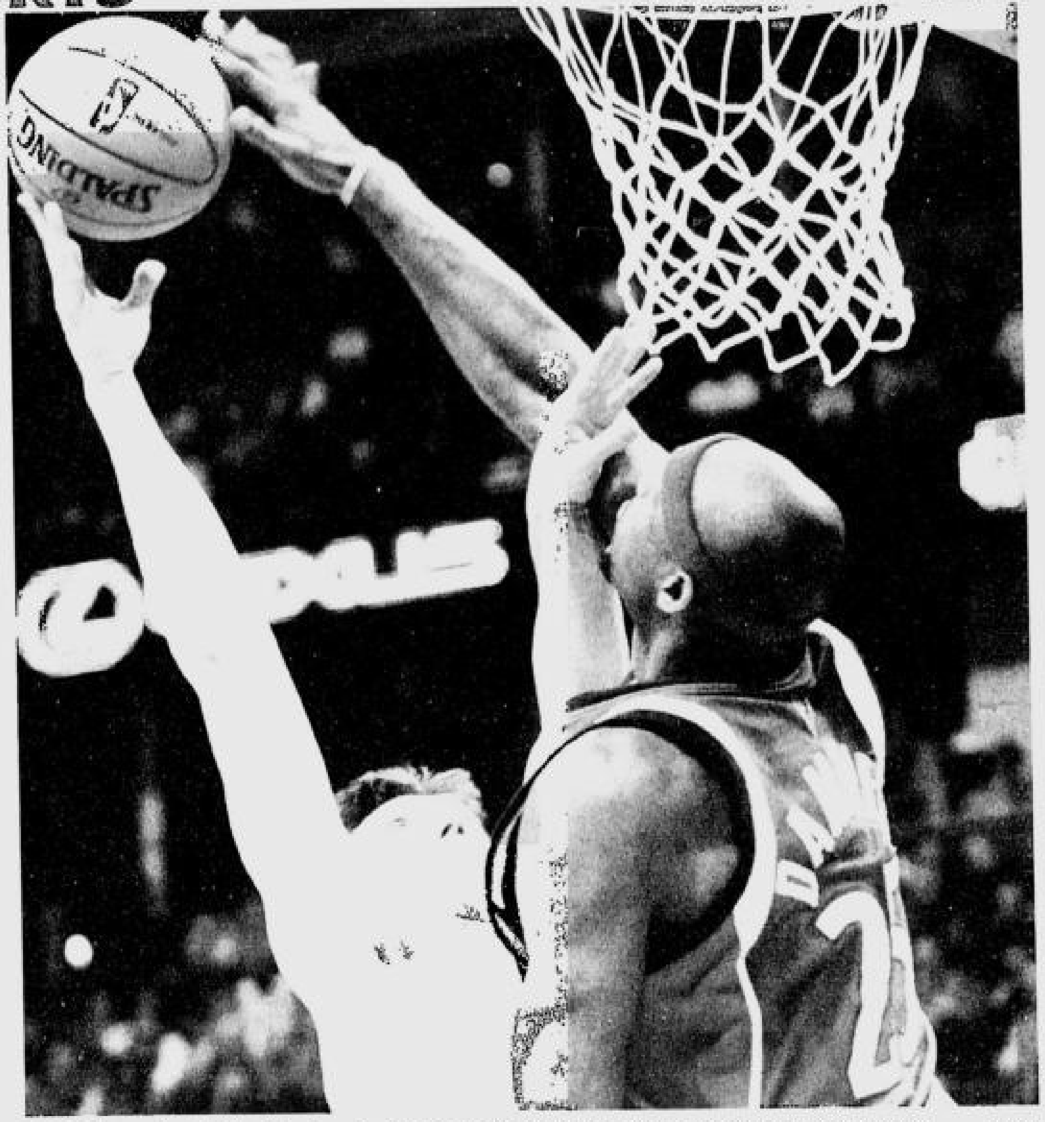
Mavericks 89, Nuggets 85

At Denver, Josh Howard had 28 points and 17 rebounds, and Jason Terry added 21 points to lead Dallas to its 10th straight victory.

Dallas played without Dirk Nowitzki, sidelined by a sinus infection.

Allen Iverson had 28 points and eight assists for Denver, and Earl Boykins added 20 points. Marcus Camby had 13 points and 13 rebounds in his first game back after missing four games because of a broken finger. *AP*


ATLANTA Hawks' Speedy Claxton (12) threads a pass between San Antonio Spurs' Tim Duncan (right) and Robert Horry. AP


ERICK Dampier of Dallas blocks a shot by Denver's Eduardo Najera in their NBA game Sunday. REUTERS

Lions shock Cowboys; KC chiefs gain playoffs

IRVING, TEXAS—THE DALLAS Cowboys lost for the third time in four games on Sunday, falling 39-31 to the Detroit Lions to head into the National Football League playoffs as the top wild card but with their first two-game losing streak of the season.

Roy Williams caught a pair of touchdown passes, Mike Furrey and Mike Williams each caught one and Jason Hanson kicked four field goals, helping Detroit to its third win of the year and its most points of the season. A loss by Detroit would have assured the Lions the first choice in next year's college draft. Dallas will open the playoffs at Seattle next weekend.

Packers 26, Bears 7

At Chicago, Brett Favre showed he still has some ammo left in that gunslinging right arm, passing for 285 yards for Green Bay (8-8).

The 37-year-old Favre was superb in what he said could be his finale.

"If this is my last game, I want to remember it," Favre said, his voice cracking and tears streaming from his eyes. "It's tough. I love these guys. I love this game. What a great way to go out against a great football team. I couldn't ask for a better way to get out."

Favre said he would discuss retirement with his family and make his announcement soon—"probably within the next couple of weeks."

Jets 23, Raiders 3

In East Rutherford, New Jersey, Chad Pennington threw a touchdown pass to Chris Baker, Leon Washington ran for a touchdown run and Mike Nugent kicked three field goals for the Jets, who recovered from a 4-12 season last year to make the playoffs.

New York (10-6) never trailed and took control in the second half. The Jets will play next weekend at New England in a first-round match-up against the AFC's No. 3 seed. The Raiders finished with the worst record in the NFL, 2-14, earning them the first overall selection in April's draft.

Chiefs 35, Jaguars 30

In Kansas City, Missouri, the Chiefs sneaked into the playoffs as Larry Johnson rushed for 138 yards on 33 carries, giving him an NFL-record 416 carries this season. His 1,789 yards broke the team record of 1,750 he set last year in only nine starts. Atlanta's Jamal Anderson had the NFL record for attempts in a season with 410 in 1998. Johnson scored three touchdowns.

The Chiefs (9-7) will play at Indianapolis next weekend. After losses Sunday by Cincinnati and Tennessee, the Chiefs reached the playoffs with a victory by the 49ers over Denver. *AP*

Brazilian sweep

SAO PAULO, BRAZIL—BRAZILians Franck Caldeira and Lucelia de Oliveira Peres won the traditional 15-km St. Silvester on Sunday amid driving tropical rains in a contest dominated by local favorites.

It was the first time since foreigners were allowed in the race starting in 1947 that Brazilian runners won both the men's and women's races. But Brazilians had an advantage this year because some top foreign runners decided not to participate.

The 23-year-old Caldeira finished in 44 minutes, 7 seconds, beating Brazil's Clodoaldo Gomes da Silva by 1 minute, 7 seconds through Sao Paulo's skyscraper-lined avenues and twisting streets. Paulo Alves dos Santos of Brazil was third in 45:17.

Caldeira, whose best previous finish was sixth in 2003, pulled ahead with seven kilometers remaining and built on his lead toward the end, leaving Da Silva and Dos Santos to contend for second and third place.

He said the outcome of the race proved that Brazilians should get more international recognition in athletics, noting that he eclipsed last year's time by Marilson dos Santos of Brazil by 14 seconds. *AP*

LUCELIA
WIZARD
BRAZIL'S Lucelia de Oliveira Peres wins the women's race. AP

3 Australian wild cards up

ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA—DEFENDing titlist Florent Serra of France beat Sweden's Joachim Johansson, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4, Monday in a match between two former champions at the Australian men's hardcourt championship, which is experimenting with a round-robin format for the first time.

Peter Luczak upset fifth-seeded Dominik Hrbaty, 6-3, 6-4, in one of three wins by Australian wild-card entries.

Chris Guccione fired 18 aces in a 7-5, 6-3 win over Germany's Benjamin Becker and Alun Jones beat Czech player Jan Hajek, 6-3, 6-2.

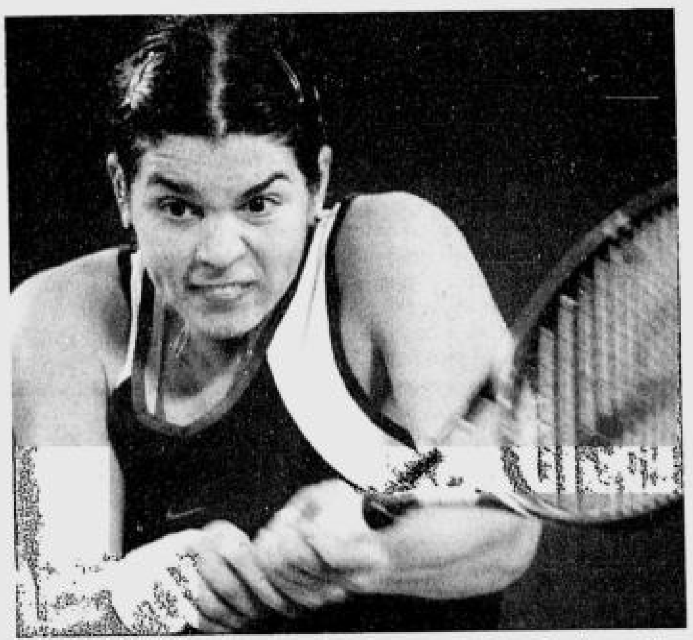
Another former Adelaide champion, former No. 1-ranked Lleyton Hewitt, made a return from injury in a doubles loss Monday. He and fellow Australian Paul Hanley went down in straight sets to Czech pair Lukas Dlouhy and Pavel Vizner.

Hewitt starts his singles campaign on Tuesday against Serbia's Janko Tipsarevic. Third-seeded Radek Stepanek takes on Vincent Spadea and second-seeded Richard Gasquet plays Florian Mayer in other Tuesday matches, while Hrbaty faces American Paul Goldstein in his second round-robin match.

The 32-player Adelaide tournament is the first to try the ATP Tour's new round-robin format in 2007.

A dozen other tournaments are expected to experiment with the format during the season.

"For the players coming off their end-of-season break, the first match back is always tough," said co-tournament director Peter Johnston. "Now they know that they'll be assured of at least two matches during the crucial buildup period to the Australian Open." *AP*


CROATIAN Sanja Ancic hits a shot to Anabel Medina Garrigues of Spain in their Hopman Cup duel. AFP

Spaniards shut out Croatians

PERTH, AUSTRALIA—A CLASSY performance from Tommy Robredo provided the highlight as Spain won its opening tie against Croatia at the mixed teams Hopman Cup here Monday.

Robredo, a past winner of the event in 2002 with Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, won a high quality singles clash with fellow top 10 player Mario Ancic in three sets to secure victory for the second seeds.

Earlier, Anabel Medina Garrigues had given Spain the lead in the tie with an easy straight sets win over Ancic's teenage sister, Sanja.

In the dead mixed doubles rubber, the Spanish pair completed a clean sweep of the tie with a 6-4 6-2 win.

With the three other seeded teams all shock losers on the first two days of the tournament, the win puts the Spanish in an ideal position to claim their third Hopman Cup title.

Much was expected of the men's singles clash, with Robredo and Ancic the two highest-ranked men in the event, and the match didn't disappoint.

Robredo is ranked seventh in the world and Ancic ninth, and the quality of tennis reflected their lofty status in the game as they enter 2007.

The taller Ancic looked in control when he claimed the first set, but Robredo lifted his rating and was playing superlative tennis by the end of the match as he won 3-6 7-5 6-3 in two hours and four minutes.

Robredo broke Ancic in the 12th game of the second set to level the match and then one more break in the last set was enough to secure victory.

The Spaniard's groundstrokes in the last two sets were exceptional and he finished the match with 27 winners, to Ancic's 18. *AFP*

Myskina may miss Open

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND—Anastasia Myskina is a doubtful starter for the Australian Open because of a toe injury which hastened her exit from the $145,000 ASB Women's Tennis Classic Monday.

Second-seeded Myskina required courtside medical treatment during her 6-1, 7-6 (7-4), 6-2 first-round loss of Argentina's Gisela Dulko.

"I realized during the match that I may not be ready for the Australian Open," the 2004 French Open and world No. 2-ranked player said. "I still feel pain there and it bothers me. Maybe I'm going to take a longer break."

The loss to Dulko was Myskina's first match since October. The 25-year-old right hander, the first Russian woman to win a Grand Slam title, is expected to decide within days whether she will play at the Australian Open starting Jan. 15 in Melbourne.

ANASTASIA MYSKINA

For Dulko, 21, it was a first win in three meetings with Myskina.

"This is the best way to start a year, she said. "I'm really happy with the way I played. It was tough against Anastasia. The only times we played, she won, so I had my revenge."

Eighth-seeded Shenay Perry was also a first round casualty Monday, losing 6-3, 5-7, 5-2 to Camille Pin of France.

Pin maintained an 82 percent first serve percentage and won 62 percent of first serve points, keeping the American under constant pressure.

Defending champion and fourth-seeded Marion Bartoli of France beat Ayumi Morita of Japan 7-6 (4), 6-3 to advance smoothly to the second round.

In other matches Sun Tiantian of China beat New Zealand wild-card entry Leanne Baker, 6-1, 6-1, and Emilie Loit completed a French sweep, beating Eva Birnerova of the Czech Republic, 6-1, 6-1.

Top-seeded Jelena Jankovic of Serbia was to play her first round match Tuesday against Julia Schruff of Germany. *AP*

SPORTS

MAN TO WATCH: Ronnie Alcano

Alcano a marked man in Kansai Open

REIGNING WORLD POOL CHAMPION Ronato Alcano will be the man to watch when he sees action in the tough 17th Kansai 9-Ball Open slated Jan. 20 and 21 at the Mag Suminoe Billiards Hall in Osaka, Japan.

The lanky, 34-year-old cue artist from Calamba City collides with some of the world's finest players whom he beat en route to the world title in Manila in November.

Apart from the stellar field of foreign bidders, Alcano will also .vie against tough compatriots in former WPC champions Efren "Bata" Reyes and Alex Pagulayan, Francisco "Django" Bustamante and Lee Van Corteza, the 2006 All Japan Championship winner.

"*Pinaghahandaan ko itong* (I prepared for the) Kansai Open, *kasama na dito ang paglalaro ko sa* (and kept myself sharp by playing) money games," said Alcano, the biggest Filipino pool star of 2006.

In his most recent international stint, Alcano reached the quarterfinals of the Power-In Super Cup in Taipei.

Osaka is the hometown of Japan's top player, Satoshi Kawabata, who is best remembered for coming from behind to foil Antonio Gabica, 9-7, in the 8-ball gold-medal match at the recent 15th Asian Games in Doha, Qatar.

Also expected to compete in the race-to-nine tournament are former world champions Wu Chia-ching and Chao Fong-pang of Taiwan and Kunihiko Takahashi of Japan, rising Japanese star and world junior runner-up Hatayo Hijikata and South Koreans Jeong Young-hwa and Kim Woong-dae.

Wu, who supplanted Pagulayan as WPC champion in 2005, teamed up with Yang Ching-shun to defeat Takahashi and Hijikata, 10-7, to win the recent Mezz Crowd Nine Cup Scotch doubles tournament in Tokyo on Saturday.

The Filipino pair of Gabica and Jeffrey de Luna settled for third place after a 9-1 rout of Koreans Jeong and Kim.

As in past Kansai Opens, top American and European players are also tipped to join the roll of tournament favorites. Osaka organizers, however, have yet to release the final list of participants.

Alcano will be joined in the tournament that stakes ¥1 million (about P420,000) for the champion by Carlo Biado, a teammate in the Bugsy Promotions stable of businessman Perry Mariano. *Marlon Bernardino, Contributor*

Despite rows, football alive and kicking again in 2006

By Cedelf P. Tupas, *Inquirer Visayas*

PHIL Younghusband (left) is denied space by a defender but Ariel Zerrudo gets possession in the RP-Brunei match. ANDY ALVAREZ

IT WAS A ROLLER-COASTER RIDE FOR PHILIPPINE football in 2006.

Despite the string of controversies that hounded the Philippine Football Federation, 2006 will be remembered as the year of the Philippines' resurgence in the Southeast Asian region and of the drawing power of the World Cup among Filipinos.

In a country obsessed with basketball and boxing, World Cup fever slowly but surely hit the Philippines from June 9 to July 10.

Thousands converged in sports bars and restaurants and other viewing areas to witness the quadrennial tournament that was marked this year by the brilliance and moment of mindless rage of Frenchman Zinedine Zidane, widely considered as the best player of his generation.

In a mad, frenetic finale, five unerring penalty kicks, the last coming from defender Fabio Grosso, sent the Italians into a frenzied victory celebration and captain Fabio Cannavaro—the 2006 World Player of the Year—held the 11-pound golden trophy aloft as cannons belched clouds of white confetti at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin.

Attendance of 60,000

Halfway around the world, at the Panaad Park and Stadium in Bacolod City, a combined attendance of 60,000 watched the Philippines' four matches at the Asean Football Championship-Qualifiers in November.

And the Filipino booters did not disappoint, winning three matches, including a 7-0 thrashing of minnows Timor Leste. Before 16,000 fans, the Filipinos clinched a spot in the Asean Championships with a clinical 4-1 beating of Brunei, a fitting follow-up to a tough 1-0 triumph over Cambodia.

"These are the lads who want to change Philippine football," national coach Aris Caslib said after the victory against Brunei.

Heroes abound for the Filipinos but none was bigger than Fil-British striker Philip Younghusband, who emerged as the tournament's top scorer with six goals.

Noteworthy performances

Also coming through with noteworthy performances were captain Aly Borromeo, midfielder Chris Greatwich and super substitute Emelio Caligdong.

The 19-year-old Younghusband, however, has ruled himself out of the Asean Championships in Thailand, leaving another dent on the Filipinos' attacking strength.

The lack of attacking flair had tolled heavily in the Philippines' campaign in the Asian Challenge Cup in Chittagong, Bangladesh, where the continent's 16 worst-ranked teams saw action.

ROMUALDEZ

Without the Younghusband brothers Phil and James and Greatwich, the Philippines managed only two points in three games, tying Afghanistan and India with similar 1-1 scorelines, after dropping a 0-1 decision to Chinese-Taipei in its first match.

Success in the Asean Qualifiers, however, gave the Philippines its best ranking in 12 years.

From its worst-ever rank of 195 in October, the Philippines leap-frogged past Vietnam (172), Cambodia (173) and Brunei (174), ending up at 171 in the year-end rankings of the international football federation (Fifa).

The Philippines now ranks seventh among 11 countries in the region.

Domestically, the National Capital Region proved to be the biggest winner with two national titles and a runner-up finish. The Big City squad, powered by players from UAAP-suspended De La Salle University, topped the National Women's Open Championship at the expense of host Oriental Negros, 3-1, in Dumaguete City in August.

Early last month, NCR outlasted Iloilo, 3-2, for the Men's Under-19 Championship held in Zamboanga City. The Metro Manila squad's victory ended Davao's three-year domination of the age-group tournament.

The National Open men's championship was reclaimed by powerhouse Negros Occidental, which pulled off one shocker after another in the country's football hotbed, Iloilo, in February.

The Negrenses, led by veteran internationalist Ziggy Tonog, Aly Rojas-Go and Southeast Asian Games campaigner Arnie Pasinabo, stunned Iloilo, 2-0, in Barotac Nuevo, before topping NCR, 2-1, in the title match.

An emerging football power in the Visayas, San Carlos City hosted the maiden staging of the National Girls' Under-17 Football Championship in May. Earning the distinction as the first-ever champion was Muntinlupa-Parañaque-Las Piñas, which trounced Iloilo, 3-1, in the finals.

Ang Liga champs

Army nipped Air Force, 3-2, in extra time to rule the PFF-Ang Liga tournament. The Airmen had defeated the Armymen to cop the first division crown of the NCR-FA-organized Adidas Futsal Tournament.

Irok FC won the women's division while UA&P ruled the men's second division.

As in many national sports association, controversies rocked the leadership of the PFF. Just a few months after hosting the SEA Games, the football body came under fire for failing to submit the roster for the Asian Women's Under-19 Championship set in April.

In February, PFF president Juan Miguel Romualdez survived a vote of no-confidence at a PFF Congress in Iloilo.

Disbursement of funds

The move was allegedly initiated by NCRFA president Pocholo Borromeo and Laguna FA president Arturo Pacificador Jr., who have been critical of the PFF leadership and the disbursement of funds over the past years.

The two football association leaders pointed to the lack of transparency and professionalism of Romualdez for the stagnant football development. Both Borromeo and Pacificador asked the PFF to open its financial records but were declined by Romualdez twice.

The issue stemmed from the PFF's revocation of its certificate of registration by the Securities and Exchange Commission on Nov. 3, 2003, three weeks before Romualdez was elected president.

The revocation was discovered only in May and the NCRFA argued that, because of the flaw, Romualdez could not claim to be the legitimate PFF president.

But the PFF ironed out the kinks in its SEC registration and Romualdez remained in power.

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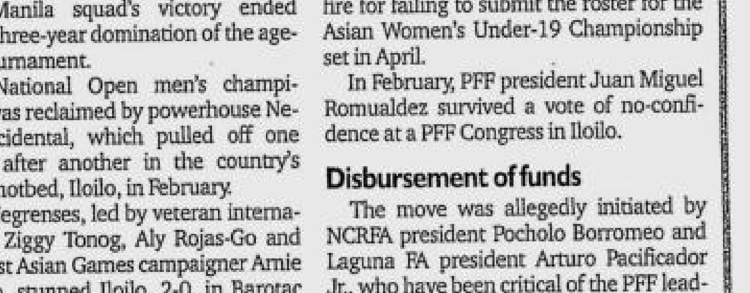
Intramuros senior golfers wrap up series; East Ridge rules finale



MEMBERS OF Club Intramuros pose for posterity after clinching the 2006 Federation of the Philippines Amateur Senior Golfers series. Standing (from left) are team manager Tony Marfori, Macoy dela Peña, Pet Cusi, Benny Arceo, Tony Pulag, Romy Dime, Rupert Bayocot, Mon Montemayor, Rey Ulob, Joe Arbulado and Jo Baldueza. Seated from left are Tony Fernando, Anthony Fernandez and Deo Bautista.

CLUB INTRAMUROS OFFICIALLY clinched the overall championship of the six-leg sries of the Federation of the Philippines Amateur Senior Golfers at the Wack Wack Golf and Country Club in Mandaluyong City on Friday.

Intramuros, backstopped by club president Anthony Fernandez, played pressure-free at Wack Wack after earlier securing the title on the strength of its three leg wins at Club Intramuros in April, Veterans Golf Club in May and the Philippine Navy in September.

East Ridge won at Wack Wack for its second leg victory after earlier winning on its home course.

Mimosa Golf Club, which also dominated the field at home, was the only other leg champion.

Twenty-four golf clubs vied in the tournament staged annually by the Senior Golfers Federation and sponsored by San Mig Coffee Free.

The other participants were Canlubang, Southwoods, Riviera, Capitol, Orchard, Aguinaldo, Villamor, Navy, Fernando Air Base, Tat Filipinas, Royal Northwoods, Lanang (Davao), Iloilo, Iligan, Everest, Apo (Davao) and Alabang.

To be able to play in any of the tournaments by the federation, which is affiliated with the Asean, Asian and the International Associations of Senior Golfers, one must be a playing member of good standing of a golf club that has its own golf course.

Player handicaps are recognized by all golf courses that are affiliated to this network of golf courses all over the world. Individual handicaps are recorded and maintained by the National Golf Association of the Philippines.

Among the mainstays of Club Intramuros, aside from Fernandez, are reigning Asean 70-75 champion Romy Garcia, Pete Lopez, Rey Ulob, Rupert Bayukot, Pol Petralba, adviser Tony Fernando, Mon Montemayor, team manager Tony Marfori and club vice president Deo Bautista.

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Politicking seen stalling economic rebound

IN THIS ISSUE

VAT seen to yield P89.42B in 2007 /B3

RP tax structure 'not equitable' /B6

Policy reversals feared in run-up to May polls

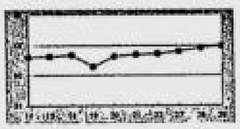
By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PHILIPPINES HAS ENTERED THE NEW YEAR RIDing on a string of good news on the macroeconomic front, but a wild card looms on the horizon—the run-up to the May elections that brings with it risks of policy reversals.

In 2006, business optimism rose as economic growth remained resilient on the back of strong export receipts and inflows from overseas Filipino workers while the government delivered on its promise to reduce its budget deficit, earning better credit rat-

POLITICKING/ B2

INDICATORS



P49.03 = $

As of 5 p.m., Dec. 29, 2006

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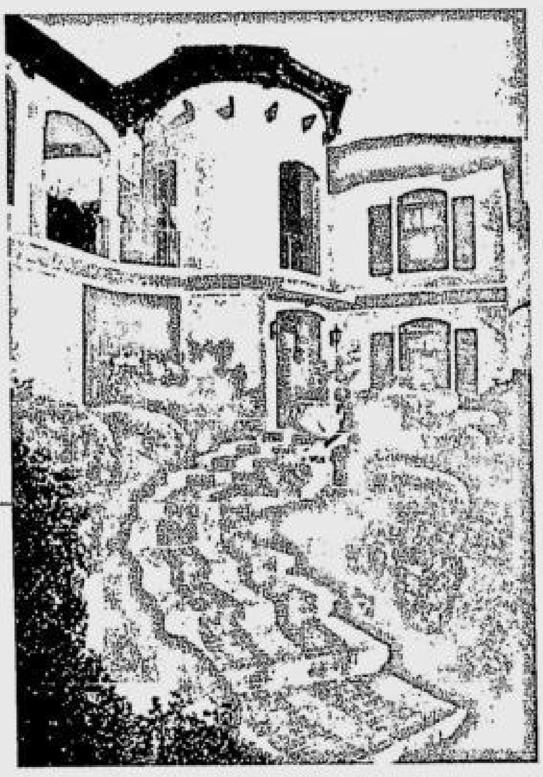

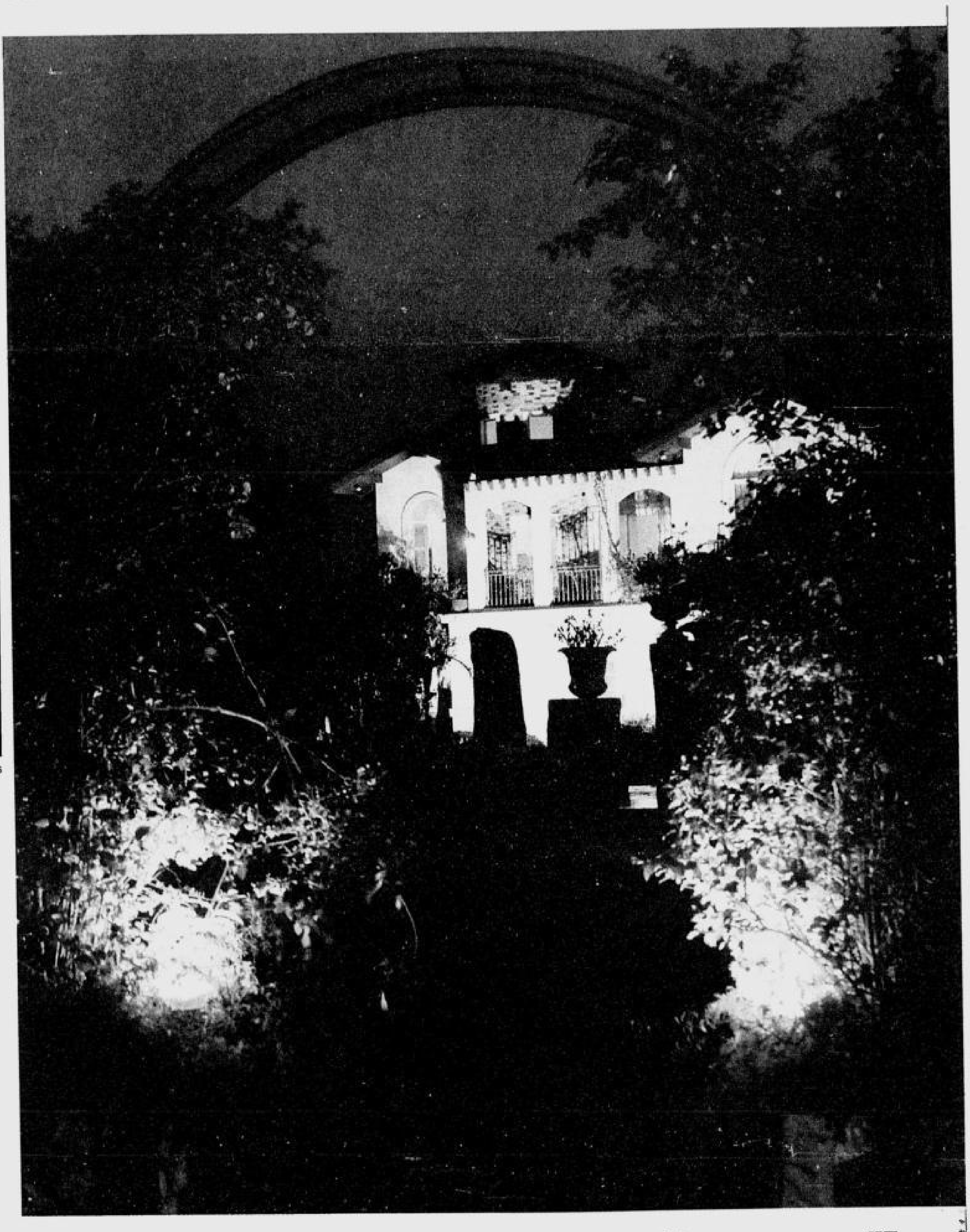

Photos by Wig Tysmans

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New Year resolutions for a better economy

No Free Lunch

Cielito F. Habito

HAPPY NEW YEAR! THE START OF ANOTHER year is always occasion to hope for a better year ahead. For the Philippine economy, current market sentiments appear to reflect such a hope, notwithstanding a general outlook for slower global economic growth and persistent negative domestic influences and threats. While I am admittedly a lonely voice, my own prognosis for next year has been more cautious.

I have explained in recent columns why our 2007 economic performance cannot be expected to be much different from 2006, and could quite likely turn for the worse. Agriculture was the main driver of our growth last year, especially in the first half, but an already ongoing El Niño spell that could reportedly extend up to August could slow agriculture a bit in 2007. The stronger peso could begin to dampen export growth. Key industries in the services sector have begun to show signs of slowing down. And the drop in overall investment since early 2005 will sooner or later translate to slower output growth.

New leaf

There are, however, certain things that could spell significant improvement in the Philippine economy in 2007, provided that certain parties turn over a new leaf and adopt and adhere to some needed New Year Resolutions. Here are some that I would personally like to see:

For the President: Lead by principle, not by politics. Since the crisis of legitimacy in the national leadership erupted two years ago, the quality of economic policy decisions and government appointments have been widely perceived to be compromised by the concern for political survival and the perpetuation of power. An often-heard lament within knowledgeable circles is how many of the President's decisions and actions with important implications for the economy appear incongruous with her Ph.D. degree in economics. The crying need right now is for the seemingly improving aggregate economic data to be translated into widely improving living conditions among Filipinos, especially the poor and hungry.

Tax collection

For the government economic managers: Regain the peak tax and revenue performance attained in 1996-97. Government revenue collection continues to fall short of targets, even with substantial improvements in revenue performance in recent years. Getting the tax effort back to around 17 percent and overall revenue effort to 20 percent of GDP would mean additions to revenues even bigger than what expanding the VAT has attained. This would in turn make it possible to reverse the disturbing consistent decline in the proportion of the national government budget allotted to education and health since 1997.

Real legislation

For members of Congress: Focus on lawmaking. A number of key legislative measures that would strengthen the economy, unleash much more economic activities and create many more jobs remain pending in Congress. Bills to rationalize fiscal incentives, establish a credit bureau, improve the BOT Law and others are among a number of pending bills that promise to address current and persistent weaknesses of the Philippine economy. I would like to see our senators and congressmen roll up their sleeves and target passing these critical economic measures before they adjourn for the elections, so that their positive impacts may indeed translate to a better economy in 2007.

Full CSR

For the business sector: Give full meaning to corporate social responsibility (CSR). Corporate social responsibility continues to be defined by too many people as merely establishing a philanthropic foundation alongside their businesses and channeling a portion of earnings to charitable projects through such entities. But CSR in its fullest sense means running one's business in a way that does not exploit its workers but treats them with respect and gives them their due share of the firm's earnings. It means producing one's product or service without damaging one's surroundings or depleting natural resources to the detriment of future generations. It means giving due respect and assistance to communities hosting one's enterprise. And it means paying the proper amount of taxes to the government, without concealing or misrepresenting one's true income.

Choosing leaders

And for the rest of us, as we face another election year: Let us choose our leaders responsibly and protect our sacred right to do so. We must resist attempts to cancel or delay our scheduled electoral exercise in May 2007. We must take the effort to know our candidates and make an informed comparison of the choices before us. We must guard our votes once we have cast them, by taking part in citizens' actions to ensure that votes are properly and accurately accounted for. And most importantly, we must vote for candidates according to their potential for responsible leadership, and not for any other reason. If we fail in these most basic of our democratic responsibilities, then we cannot complain about the people who rule over us, for we always get the leaders we deserve.

A happy and better New Year to all of us—and may it bring us Filipinos new enlightened leaders who will make it so! *Comments are welcome at chabito@ateneo.edu*

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of December 29, 2006)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	7.3	7.4	7.3	7.4	31,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	46.5	46.5	46	46	235,600
Bank of the Phil. Islands	63	63.5	63	63.5	561,700
China Banking Corp.	690	690	680	680	32,590
Citystate Savings Bank	19	19	19	19	600
Export and Ind. Bank A	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.47	4,130,000
Equitable Pci Bank Inc.	83	84	81.5	83	93,400
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	51.5	51.5	51	51.5	674,700
Philippine National Bank	44	44.5	44	44	79,600
Phil. Savings Bank	48	48	48	48	2,000
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	24.75	24.75	24	24	116,200
Security Bank Corp.	65.5	65.5	65	65.5	70,200
Union Bank of the Phil.	49	50	49	49	12,100
OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS					
Atr Kimeng Fin. Corp.	1.96	2.08	1.96	2.08	281,000
Bankard Inc.	0.78	0.8	0.78	0.8	1,000,000
Citiseconline.Com Inc.	5.4	5.6	5.3	5.6	450,000
First Abacus Financial	0.74	0.8	0.7	0.79	1,230,000
First Metro Invest. Corp	30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5	10,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1650	1650	1650	1650	10
Pci Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.32	1.32	1.32	1.32	400,000
Phil. Stock Exchange Inc.	280	280	280	280	500
Sun Life Financial Inc.	2040	2045	2040	2045	690
Ivantage Corp.	1.68	1.68	1.64	1.66	7,323,000
ELECTRICITY, ENERGY, POWER & WATER					
Pnoc Energy Dev. Corp.	4.8	4.95	4.8	4.85	235,243,000
First Gen Corp.	56	56.5	56	56.5	981,300
First Phil Hldgs Corp	63.5	63.5	63	63	270,700
Manila Electric Co. A	54.5	54.5	53.5	54	188,800
Manila Electric Co. B	55	56	54.5	55	493,700
Manila Water Co. Inc.	9.6	9.6	9.4	9.4	4,645,000
Petron Corp.	4.1	4.1	4.05	4.1	1,819,000
East Asia Power Res. Corp	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.29	660,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	1.12	1.14	1.12	1.14	726,000
FOOD, BEVERAGE & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	27,000
Cadp Group Corp.	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	40,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	20.25	21	20.25	21	32,200
Jollibee Foods Corp.	42.5	42.5	41	42	895,100
Pancake House Inc.	6.5	6.5	6.2	6.3	12,000
Rfm Corp.	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.02	130,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	2.75	2.75	2.7	2.7	95,000
Swift Food Inc.	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	40,000
San Miguel Corp. A	66.5	67.5	66.5	67.5	124,000
San Miguel Corp. B	74.5	77.5	74.5	77.5	385,800
Alliance Tuna Int'l, Inc.	2.12	2.14	2.1	2.1	476,000
Universal Robina Corp.	19.25	19.25	19	19.25	969,400
CONSTRUCTION, INFRASTRUCTURE & ALLIED SERVICES					
Southeast Asian Cement	1	1.02	0.99	0.99	8,130,000
Engineering Equip. Inc.	3.15	3.15	3.15	3.15	391,000
Fortune Cement Corp.	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	6,000
Holcim Philippines Inc.	7.8	7.8	7.7	7.8	1,466,000
Phil Nat'l Const. Corp.	6.5	6.5	6.3	6.3	32,000
Republic Cement Corp.	3.95	3.95	3.95	3.95	123,000
CHEMICALS					
Chemrez Technologies Inc	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.4	7,719,000
Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	0.6	0.64	0.6	0.64	100,000
DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS					
Geograce Res. Phil. Inc.	0.71	0.73	0.7	0.71	16,750,000
Macondray Plastics Inc.	2.5	3	2.5	3	5,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.2	0.205	0.195	0.2	9,760,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.008	0.0085	0.008	0.008	19,000,000
Ayala Corp.	580	590	575	590	241,950
Alsons Cons. Res. Inc.	0.64	0.66	0.64	0.65	350,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	7	7.1	7	7	316,000
Alliance Global Group Inc	8.4	8.5	8.4	8.5	49,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	3,300,000
A. Soriano Corp.	2.85	2.85	2.8	2.85	230,000
Apc Group Inc.	0.37	0.37	0.36	0.37	2,270,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	28,500,000
Anglo Phil Holdings Corp.	1.14	1.16	1.12	1.12	1,920,000
Baguio Gold Holdings Corp	3.15	3.3	3.1	3.1	77,000
Balabac Resources & Hldgs	1.12	1.12	1.12	1.12	8,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	9.4	9.7	9.4	9.7	5,243,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	2.22	2.22	2.14	2.16	9,788,000
Dmci Holdings Inc.	6.1	6.1	6	6.1	1,557,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	3.6	3.65	3.6	3.65	2,344,000
F&J Prince Holdings Corp.	1	1	0.9	1	80,000
F&J Prince Hldgs. B	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.02	10,000
Forum Pacific Inc.	0.25	0.27	0.25	0.26	2,280,000
House of Investments Inc.	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	381,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc	10.5	11	10.5	11	1,824,800
Medco Holdings	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	1,600,000
Magnum Holdings Inc	3.85	3.85	3.6	3.6	128,000
Multitech Inv. Corp.	1.58	1.62	1.54	1.54	653,000
Pacifica	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	10,000,000
Prime Orion Phils. Inc.	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19	100,000
Prime Media Holdings Inc	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	20,000
Republic Glass Hldg. Corp	1.7	1.7	1.5	1.7	49,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.65	0.65	0.65	0.65	1,100,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.155	0.16	0.155	0.16	430,000
Sm Investments Corp.	330	330	320	325	33,600
South China Resources Inc	0.98	0.98	0.97	0.97	100,000
Unioil Res. & Holdings Co	0.31	0.31	0.29	0.29	4,970,000
Wellex Industries Inc.	0.12	0.135	0.12	0.13	170,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	15.5	15.5	15	15.25	3,454,600
Araneta Properties Inc.	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	130,000
Belle Corp.	1.14	1.14	1.12	1.12	7,917,000
A Brown Company Inc.	1.58	1.64	1.56	1.58	1,088,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.42	0.43	0.42	0.42	5,950,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	3.2	3.2	3.15	3.2	94,000
C & P Homes Inc.	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	60,000
Cebu Prop. Vent. A	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	20,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	1,500,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.54	0.55	0.53	0.54	18,560,000
Edsa Prop. Holdings Inc.	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	310,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.0625	0.0625	0.0625	0.0625	1,100,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	2.14	2.16	2.1	2.14	25,215,000
Highlands Prime Inc.	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.5	42,000
Interport Res.	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	8,000,000
Keppel Phils. Prop. Inc.	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	10,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.45	0.45	0.45	0.45	1,860,000
City & Land Developers	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.6	28,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.63	0.64	0.63	0.64	2,060,000
Marsteel Cons. Inc. A	0.016	0.016	0.015	0.015	2,500,000
Megaworld Corp.	2.38	2.42	2.36	2.42	57,162,000
Metro Pacific Inv. Corp.	4.8	5	4.7	5	373,000
Mrc Allied Ind. Inc.	0.38	0.39	0.37	0.38	1,010,000
Philippine Estates Corp.	0.15	0.16	0.15	0.16	440,000
Polar Property Holdings	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	8,000
Robinsons Land Corp.	16	16.25	15.75	16.25	2,069,200
Phil Realty and Holdings	0.65	0.67	0.65	0.66	2,660,000
Sm Development Corp.	2.7	2.7	2.65	2.65	1,556,000
Sm Prime Holdings Inc.	11.25	11.25	10.5	10.75	3,690,200
Suntrust Home Dev. Inc.	0.56	0.59	0.56	0.59	150,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.11	0.11	0.105	0.105	2,910,000
MEDIA					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp	20.5	20.5	20.25	20.25	25,800
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	50,000
TELECOMMUNICATIONS					
Digital Telecom Phils Inc	1.94	1.96	1.9	1.96	11,264,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	1240	1245	1235	1235	31,680
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	6.7	6.9	6.6	6.9	7,399,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	2460	2570	2460	2550	159,220
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY					
Boulevard Holdings Inc.	0.195	0.195	0.19	0.19	10,800,000
Imperial Res.	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	34,000,000
Ionics Inc.	2.18	2.18	2.16	2.16	425,000
Ipvg Corp.	3.8	3.85	3.7	3.85	626,000
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.055	0.055	0.055	0.055	3,400,000
Ism Communications Corp.	0.0575	0.0575	0.0575	0.0575	100,000
Transpacific Broadband	1.8	2	1.8	1.88	1,939,000
Philweb Corp.	0.031	0.031	0.031	0.031	22,400,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	4	4.1	4	4.1	112,000
Aboitiz Trans. Sys. Corp.	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	20.25	20.75	20.25	20.75	340,700
Keppel Phils. Marine Inc	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.94	150,000
HOTEL & LEISURE					
Grand Plaza Hotel Corp.	18.75	18.75	18.75	18.75	200
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	1.98	1.98	1.9	1.9	3,485,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.58	0.6	0.58	0.6	3,400,000
EDUCATION					
Centro Escolar University	9.3	9.4	9.1	9.3	308,000
Far Eastern University	810	810	810	810	10
Ipeople Inc	3.05	3.1	3.05	3.1	150,000
DIVERSIFIED SERVICES					
Macroasia Corp.	2.12	2.14	2.08	2.1	185,000
Paxys Inc	19.75	19.75	19.5	19.75	1,288,700
Prime Gaming Phils. Inc	40	50	40	50	7,000
MINING					
Apex Mining Co. Inc A	6	6.1	6	6	683,000
Apex Mining Co. Inc B	6.2	6.2	6	6	175,000
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.012	0.012	0.011	0.012	47,000,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	9.9	9.9	9.7	9.7	2,158,000
Benguet Corp. A	9.5	9.5	9.3	9.3	75,000
Dizon Copper Silver Mines	3	3	2.9	3	91,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.27	0.27	0.26	0.26	12,370,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.28	0.28	0.27	0.27	5,530,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.024	0.024	0.023	0.024	501,500,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.027	0.027	0.026	0.026	345,700,000
Omico Corp.	0.013	0.013	0.012	0.013	795,800,000
Philex Mining Corp.	4.05	4.15	4.05	4.05	7,721,000
Semirara Mining Corp.	18.5	18.5	18.25	18.25	163,900
United Paragon Mining Co.	0.73	0.73	0.71	0.72	770,000
Vulcan Ind'l	1.46	1.46	1.38	1.4	4,508,000
OIL					
Basic Petroleum Corp.	0.28	0.29	0.28	0.28	9,030,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.011	0.012	0.011	0.011	19,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.012	0.012	0.012	0.012	362,400,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	1.04	1.04	1.02	1.04	1,140,000
Pnoc Exploration Corp.-B	24	24	23	23	900
Petroenergy Res. Corp.	9.8	9.9	9.8	9.8	186,000

Market bullish as Megaworld starts P11-B stock rights issue

PROPERTY GIANT MEGAWORLD CORP. kicks off today a stock rights offering with analysts remaining bullish following the strong market interest in Philippine equities for 2007.

Megaworld is offering an additional 5.9 billion common shares to raise P11 billion for its expansion. The rights offer ends Jan. 9.

"The investing community as well as local and foreign stockbrokers are viewing the stock rights favorably in light if the current property boom," said Megaworld executive director Kingson Sian.

"We see an overwhelming interest in the take up of Megaworld stock rights by existing shareholders given the very attractive pricing of P1.83 per share, which is a 24-percent discount off Megaworld's closing price of P2.42 on Dec. 29, 2006," said Ed Francisco, president of BDO Capital, the financial adviser of the rights issue.

As a result of the stock rights, analysts expect further upside in Megaworld shares.

"The rights offering will substantially boost Megaworld's capitalization, putting it into the league of companies with a market cap above $1 billion," said Gilbert Lopez, senior analyst of Macquarie Research Equities. This will make Megaworld one of the biggest capitalized property players, making it more attractive for large institutional funds to invest in the company.

Megaworld is the market leader in two of the fastest growing segments in the real estate industry: the mid-income residential market and business process outsourcing (BPO) market.

Jody Santiago, head of research for UBS, one of the world's leading investment banks, said in its Dec. 4 report that the funds from the rights issue could help Megaworld enhance its dominant position in both market segments.

The P11-billion proceeds would allow Megaworld to acquire more land to beef up its portfolio, put up additional office and retail space that could raise recurring revenues to 25 percent of total revenue in the next four years, and jumpstart its new Homelite home financing portfolio, UBS said.

One out of every three residential condominiums being sold belongs to Megaworld, according to Colliers Jardine. In the office market, meanwhile, Megaworld is currently the biggest BPO office developer in the country. It plans to cement this reputation by building around 400,000 sq.m. of additional BPO office space over the next five years.

Meanwhile, analyst Alfred Dy of CLSA Asia-Pacific Markets, in a recent report, said: "Megaworld is a major player in the fast growing BPO and OFW markets, which should remain hot in the coming years."

Kelly Lim of JP Morgan Asia-Pacific Equity Research advises investors to "maintain overweight on Megaworld."

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CLUB	SELLER	BUYER
Alabang Country Club A/B*	1,100,000/1,300,000*	1,000,000
Alta Vista A/B*/Corp.**	-	300,000/Pls. Call*/Pls. Call**
Baguio Country Club	-	500,000
Camp John Hay	Pls. Call	Pls. Call
Canlubang Golf	-	420,000
Canyon Woods	500,000	
Capitol Hills	50,000	
Cebu Country Club	Pls. Call	Pls. Call
Celebrity Sports	Pls. Call	50,000
Club Filipino	90,000	
Eagleridge A/B*/C**	260,000*/300,000**	Pls. Call
Eastridge A/B*	Pls. Call	
Evercrest	65,000	
Fairways & Bluewater	Pls. Call	Pls. Call
Forest Hills A/B*/C**	90,000/150,000*	Pls. Call
Luisita Golf	Pls. Call	Pls. Call
Manila Golf Corporate	Pls. Call	12,000,000
Manila Golf Individual	Pls. Call	11,600,000
Manila Polo	2,900,000	2,700,000
Manila Southwoods A/B*	Pls. Call*	
Makati Sports Club A	200,000	
Manila Yacht Club Ind.	280,000	
Metropolitan Club A/B*	160,000	
Mimosa Ind./C2*/C3**	Pls. Call	Pls. Call/550,000**
Mt. Malarayat A	180,000	
Orchard A/B*/C**	160,000/Pls. Call*/325,000**	150,000/300,000*
Punta Fuego	Pls. Call	Pls. Call
Quezon City Sports Club	150,000	Pls. Call
Riviera Golf A/B*/C**	80,000/170,000*/250,000**	Pls. Call*
Rockwell Leisure Club	Pls. Call	Pls. Call
Royale Tagaytay CC	65,000	
Sherwood A/B*/C**	70,000/150,000**	
Sta. Elena Golf A/B*	-	1,300,000
Subic Golf	160,000	
Summit Point A	300,000	
The Palms Country Club	400,000	330,000
Country Club at Tagaytay Highlands	320,000	
Tagaytay Highlands	650,000	620,000
Tagaytay Midlands	Pls. Call	600,000
The Country Club	2,000,000	
Tower Club A/B*	150,000/180,000*	
Valley Golf	220,000	
Valle Verde Ind.	180,000	
Wack Wack Golf	Pls. Call	Pls. Call

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CLUB	SELLER	BUYER
Alabang Country Club "A" (Filipino)	1,100,000	1,000,000
Alabang Country Club "B" (Foreigner)	-	1,050,000
Anvaya Cove Beach and Nature Club	Please Call	-
Baguio Country Club	-	500,000
Calatagan Golf Club "A"	40,000	-
Calatagan Golf Club "B"	60,000	-
Camp John Hay	-	300,000
Canlubang	500,000	425,000
Capitol Hills	40,000	-
Cebu Country Club	1,600,000	1,400,000
Celebrity Sports Club	120,000	100,000
Club Filipino	100,000	90,000
Eagleridge "A"/"B"/"C"	Please Call	-
Forest Hills "A"	100,000	-
Forest Hills "B"	150,000	-
Forest Hills "C"	190,000	-
Luisita Golf "A"	350,000	-
Makati Sports Club "A"	180,000	150,000
Makati Sports Club "B"	200,000	-
Manila Golf (Corporate)	-	12,500,000
Manila Golf (Individual)	-	11,600,000
Manila Polo	2,750,000	2,600,000
Manila Southwoods "A"	300,000	-
Manila Southwoods "B"	750,000	630,000
Manila Yacht Club	250,000	-
Mimosa (Individual)	230,000	200,000
Mimosa (Corporate)	650,000	550,000
Mt. Malarayat Golf "A"	180,000	-
Mt. Malarayat Golf "C"	350,000	-
Orchard Golf Club "A"	190,000	140,000
Orchard Golf Club "B"	310,000	-
Orchard Golf Club "C"	350,000	-
Quezon City Sports Club	150,000	125,000
Spa & Lodge	580,000	450,000
Sta. Elena "A"	1,600,000	1,300,000
Sta. Elena "B"	2,140,000	1,800,000
Subic Bay Golf	200,000	-
Tagaytay Country Club	320,000	290,000
Tagaytay Highlands	Please Call	600,000
Tagaytay Midlands	650,000	620,000
Valle Verde (Individual)	50,000	-
Valley Golf	200,000	180,000
Wack-Wack Golf Club	-	6,900,000

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Jollibee merging 3 subsidiaries

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

JOLLIBEE FOODS CORP., THE COUNTRY'S biggest fast food chain, has filed an application with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) seeking approval to merge its three large brands—Chowking, Delifrance and Greenwich.

Chowking, as the surviving entity of the merger, will be renamed Fresh N' Famous Foods Inc.

INQUIRER sources said the merged company would allow Jollibee's executives and officers to map out strategies for the brands instead of getting tied down with administrative and legal work.

The merger is seen to be revenue neutral or have no impact on revenues, but will contribute to better efficiencies in the group's operations.

Jollibee embarked on a major reorganization of its businesses since 2004 to increase efficiencies and fast track its growth.

Sources said there were no plans to list Fresh N' Famous Foods on the stock exchange as of this time since the Jollibee Group was not in need of fresh funds for its expansion plans.

Last November, Jollibee announced it would merge Chowking Food Corp., Greenwich Pizza Corp. and Baker Fresh Foods Philippines to form a P3-billion company. The amount represents the combined stockholders' equity of the three firms. The merger has yet to be approved by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The emerging entity, Fresh N' Famous Foods, will be the second-biggest food service company in the country after Jollibee Foods itself, accounting for 52 percent of groupwide sales, chief financial officer Ysmael Baysa had said.

Based on sales in the first half of 2006, Fresh N' Famous Foods would have annual sales of P12.8 billion, Baysa said, counting Chowking's P8.9 billion, Greenwich's P3.5 billion and Delifrance's P400 million. These units had a total of 624 stores in the Philippines as of Oct. 31.

Jollibee aims to become Asia's leading fast food player in 10 years, Baysa said.

Politicking . . .

From page B1

ing prospects. Inflation and interest rates also slowed down and foreign investments picked up while the peso gained sharply.

The single biggest event that had the biggest positive impact on the economy last year was the implementation of the expanded value-added tax law, which arrested the deterioration in government finances, Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said.

To cap the year, the government approved the settlement of $220 million in remaining debts to the International Monetary Fund, paving the way for an early exit from a non-funding monitoring arrangement with the multilateral institution.

Agost Benard, associate director for sovereign ratings at Standard & Poor's, said the prepayment of the IMF debts itself would not have a material impact on the Philippine government's sovereign ratings, as the amount was but "a drop in the bucket" compared to the $35 billion in public external debt.

"Nonetheless, it is positive in its signaling effect. It conveys that the country's external finances are on the right track, with dependency on external funds declining," Benard said.

"I would see this as just one more in a string of positive developments we have seen throughout this year, and it is all those developments in combination which could have an effect on the rating, not the prepayment of this debt per se," he added.

A yearend economic review by local consultancy firm Lazaro, Bernardo, Tiu & Associates authored by Romeo Bernardo and Christine Tang warned that politics could end up as the economy's bane this new year.

"The macroeconomic numbers leave much to look forward to in 2007, especially if global conditions remain benign and planned ventures (such as those approved by the Board of Investments and export processing zones) materialize. However, with 2007 being an election year, the first six months will likely be lost to politics and politicians," the report said.

The report said the greater risk to sustaining growth would be if the administration were to abandon sound economic policies or misspending hard-earned money on dubious expenditures just to win votes.

"A highly likely scenario for 2007 would see the economy taking the backseat to politicking. The period through mid-year would see investors sidelined, observing the turn of events from the elections," it said.

But the report noted that despite politics, economic growth would proceed on the momentum obtained from remittance-fueled consumer spending.

"Should election results convince the market of political and policy stability going forward, the second half of 2007 may see the economy back in the driver's seat. Should outstanding issues remain unsettled after the elections, the economy can be expected to continue to muddle along over the medium-term," it said.

With macroeconomic conditions stabilizing and the external environment relatively calm, the report said the next big challenge would be to transform the improved business confidence level into real investments, starting with sectors long expected to jumpstart a fresh wave of capital accumulation—power, mining, build-operate-transfer infrastructure projects.

"In our view, a demonstration of resolve to remove obstacles to doing business is required to attract the critical mass of investments needed to sustain higher growth and create jobs for the growing labor force. To this end, opening the Naia Terminal 3 facility for operations would be a good starting point," the report said.

Development Bank of Singapore, in a recent commentary, said investment should benefit from an increase in government spending as state coffers improve.

BOI says registered projects in 2006 increased 16% to ₱190.66B

PROJECTS REGISTERED WITH THE Board of Investments reached P190.66 billion in 2006, or 16 percent higher than the P163.28 billion listed in 2005.

Trade Undersecretary Elmer C. Hernandez, who is also BOI managing head, said the total amount of investments committed with the agency was higher than the 10-percent target growth at P180 billion.

"2006 was a good year for BOI," Hernandez said. "We are optimistic that this can be further sustained through 2007."

Hernandez said the better than expected numbers were a result of the government's much improved fiscal position, and the improved business environment as well.

"Transaction costs were also reduced while the country's credit rating was upgraded," he said. "All of these helped in attracting more investments."

Some of the largest projects listed with the BOI last year were GNPower Ltd.'s P43.9-billion coal-fired power plant, Smart Communications' P33-billion 3G cellular phone system, as well as Globe Telecom's P5.5-billion project.

To improve the country's attractiveness as an investment destination, the newly formed National Competitiveness Council has lined up programs that mainly focus on cutting red tape and easing access to financing.

The council has organized six working groups covering previously identified areas of concern that include human resources, efficient public and private sector management, effective access to financing, improved transaction flows and costs (minimizing red tape), seamless infrastructure network, and energy cost competitiveness and self sufficiency.

Other possible areas seen to need NCC intervention are the issue of addressing bureaucratic red tape, especially on easing the entry and exit of goods, as well as of business persons, making consistent the implementation of agreed business rules, institutionalizing impact analyses on government requirements, and averting economic sabotage.

Another area is that of financing.

TFPC expects to build the capacity of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises through the finance programs it hopes to put in place.

Ronnel W. Domingo

In 2007, SMEs will get big boost from Citem projects

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY's trade promotion unit has set 23 trade fairs and missions in 2007 to boost business for exporters, especially small- and medium-sized firms that produce and ship out products made of local materials.

The Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions said it was preparing to explore more opportunities in overseas markets, such as those in the United States, Europe, Japan, China, and the Middle East.

"We want more business activities for our SMEs and to encourage them to try out new markets," said Trade Assistant Secretary Fe Agoncillo-Reyes, who is also the executive director of Citem.

Reyes said that for the information technology and IT-enabled services, Citem would be sending delegations to the following fairs: Software Development Expo & Conference in Japan, CommunicAsia in Singapore, American Health Information Management Association or Ahima Convention & Exhibition in the United States, and Asian Games Developers Summit in Singapore.

She said Citem was also considering sending a business mission to New York, Washington, and Florida in the United States, as well as to the United Kingdom.

For food, health and wellness, Citem plans to organize groups of local firms that will participate in FMI Chicago, Asean Health and Wellness Exhibition, the Asean Food and Beverage Exhibition to be held in Japan, and the Anuga in Germany.

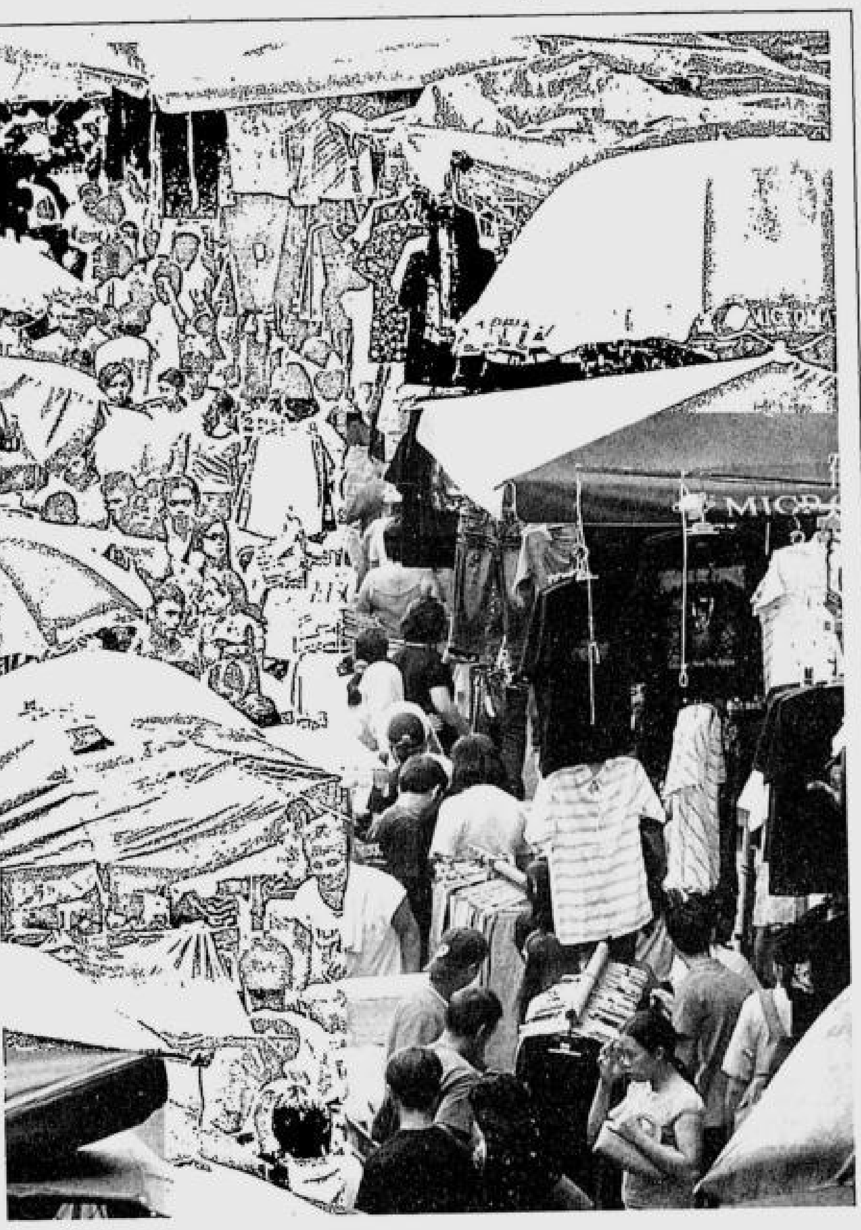
A food mission to Gulf states is also scheduled, which will cover Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

"We want to work closely with all sectors and send business delegations for market research and business opportunities," she said.

In 2005, Citem-led activities generated $278.2 million in export sales and P272.3 million in domestic returns for 2,037 SMEs and private firms.

Ronnel W. Domingo

VAT seen to yield ₱89.42B in 2007



MERCHANTS OF BACLARAN
Baclaran's market scene is both colorful and chaotic. It continues to draw thousands to its ramshackle stalls filled with untold wares that may be had for a song. ARNOLD ALMACEN

Expected revenue is 19% higher than ₱75B in '06

By Michelle V. Remo

THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT in 2007 hopes to collect P89.42 billion in additional revenues from the continued implementation of the Value-Added Tax Reform law.

The amount represents a 19-percent increase from the 2006 collection target of P75 billion.

The VAT law, considered the centerpiece of the Arroyo administration's fiscal reform agenda, basically expanded the coverage of the VAT to include previously exempted services and products, such as oil and electricity, among others.

The law likewise raised the VAT rate from 10 to 12 percent, and the corporate income tax rate from 32 to 35 percent.

Of the target revenue for 2007, the Bureau of Customs (BOC) has been assigned to collect P60.75 billion, while the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) will account for P28.67 billion.

The BIR collects VAT from domestically produced goods and rendered services, while the BOC charges the tax on imported merchandise.

The government believes that the realization of the promised revenues from the VAT law would help the country improve its credit image before the international financial community, and could even bring about a credit rating upgrade.

For 2006, the Department of Finance is confident that the government will hit its P75-billion revenue collection target out of the implementation of the VAT law.

The DOF earlier reported that the government generated a total of P61.7 billion in additional revenue from January to October, 2006—exceeding the 10-month target of P60.3 billion.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said the VAT collection in the first 10 months of 2006 kept the government on track of its full-year target of P75 billion.

"Almost a third of the revenue collection from this tax measure is allocated to needed investments in social services and infrastructure," Teves said.

Under the VAT law, the government must allocate 30 percent of the proceeds of the tax measure collected in 2006 to infrastructure development and improvement of basic services.

Fiscal authorities said that the VAT law, which had a tough time sailing through Congress due to opposition from militant and consumer groups, is expected to help the government achieve its goal of posting a zero budget deficit by 2008.

The law took effect in November 2005, initially implementing the expansion of the coverage of the original VAT and the hike in the corporate income tax rate.

The hike in the VAT rate from 10 to 12 percent took effect in February this year.

The budget deficit is expected to reach between P80 billion and P90 billion this year. In 2007, it is projected to reach P63 billion. If all goes well, the deficit will be completely wiped out by 2008.

Telecom firm to undergo rehabilitation

THE PETITION OF LIBERTY TELECOMS HOLDINGS Inc. for corporate rehabilitation has been approved by a rehabilitation court, the company said in a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange.

Liberty was incorporated in January 1994, to engage in real and personal property businesses and to offer voice and data communications through subsidiary Liberty Broadcasting Network, Inc. It is currently suspended from trading.

Acting corporate secretary Efren Chavez said the company would submit the "unqualified report" of the independent auditor on the company's 2005 financial statement in order to comply with the bourse's requirements on relisting.

According to exchange rules, the bourse would suspend trading of a listed firm that files for rehabilitation. The suspension will last until after the court approves a rehabilitation plan and the company submits a comprehensive corporate disclosure on the effects of the program on the firm's capital structure.

Riza T. Olchondra

What a year that was!

QUESTIONS OF POLICIES

Honesto C. General

THE YEAR THAT ENDED YESTERDAY will be remembered as one of the most remarkable in our history.

Even the nonlife insurance industry was rocked by the offer of the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) to be the sole provider of Compulsory Third Party Liability (CPTL) insurance. But this was a small side show in the political circus.

After her election in 2004, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was accused of wholesale cheating, casting doubt on her legitimacy. This led to an unsuccessful attempt at the House of Representatives to impeach her.

Finally, in February 2006, the opposition went to the streets in the hope that the demonstrations would ultimately lead to a coup—People Power 3.

At the Edsa Shrine, a huge throng (mostly leftist, judging from the red flags) massed. In Makati, 20,000 marched down Ayala Avenue. There were contingents of Erap diehards, rabble rousers of a TV evangelist, and Sen. Ping Lacson's supporters. Each group waved a differently colored flag. It was a very colorful show.

After just a week or so, the demonstrations at Ayala Avenue fizzled out when the employees in the business district stuck to their desks, and the residents in the surrounding upscale subdivisions stayed home watching the TV coverage. Paying the demonstrators at the rate of P100 a day per head could not be kept up for long.

But Malacañang's counterstrokes will be studied for years to come and should provide a manual for nipping a rebellion in the bud.

At the Edsa shrine, the police broke up the crowd with truncheons. Some well-known personalities who are always around during these demonstrations were rounded up, but later released.

The Edsa crowd wanted to go to Ayala Avenue. The police blocked the crowd in Mandaluyong.

Obviously, the tactic was to prevent the crowds from getting too big. Another tactic was to disperse the crowds by sundown.

Then, the final counterstroke. At Mendiola bridge, the crowd (including Teofisto Guingona) was hosed down with a water cannon. This water treatment ended the participation of the mercenaries (the so-called *hakot* crowd) in the demonstrations.

A contingent of marines and rangers was supposed to provide the military component to the coup. But these forces were kept in check.

After the failed coup attempt, the opposition tried again to impeach the President. She was accused of rigging the election by phoning Election Commissioner Garcillano.

This led to: The Apology. In a move never done before by a sitting president, GMA admitted to phoning Garcillano. And, GMA told the nation how sorry she was.

Garcillano, who had been in hiding, suddenly showed up and testified in the House hearings. He was grilled by the opposition. In the end, nothing came out of it. And the impeachment try again failed.

To round up the year, the Filipino people were treated to the Cha-cha spectacle, the attempt by the House, led by Speaker De Venecia, to change the form of government from a bicameral presidential to a unicameral parliament, which the President supports. (I have a very strong feeling that GMA supported Cha-cha so that the House would not impeach her.)

The House wanted to convene Congress into a Constituent Assembly (Con-Ass) with both the House and the Senate voting as one. This way the House could swamp the Senate in the voting.

But now, the Con-Ass has been mercifully shelved. The May 2007 elections are fast approaching and every congressman wants to start campaigning. Happy days are here again!

By year end, the President has weathered all the typhoons that swirled around her. She has outsmarted all the politicians of every color and stripe. She is firmly in control.

Happy new year all!

DTI heads off business registration rush

By Ronnel W. Domingo

THE TRADE DEPARTMENT'S NAtional Capital Region office announced that it would be beefing up its off-site facilities for the January rush in business registration to avert crowding in its Makati headquarters.

Trade Assistant Secretary Angel L. Pelayo said January was considered the peak season of business name registration because many entrepreneurs believed it would be good luck to establish a business at the start of the year.

"This coincides with the schedule of the renewal of business permits in local government units," Pelayo said. "That is why we carefully studied this situation and implemented innovations that would make the system more responsive and efficient."

She urged business owners to consider other means in filing business name applications such as the DTI-NCR satellite offices spread across the metropolis.

The satellite offices, mostly located in city halls, accept business name applications based on their schedule:

Ground floor of the Manila City Hall (Mondays and Wednesdays, 8 a.m. until noon), ground floor of the Muntinlupa City Hall (Fridays, 8 a.m. up to 5 p.m.), ground floor of the Las Piñas Business One Stop Shop Center (Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 8 a.m. up to 5 p.m.), ground floor of the Pasig Business Center at the Pasig City Hall Complex (Wednesdays, 8 a.m. up to 5 p.m.), second floor of the Marikina City Hall (Thursdays, 8 a.m. up to noon), second floor of the Cooling Tower (Monday to Thursday, 8 a.m. up to 5 p.m., and Friday 8 a.m. up to noon) and third floor of the Valenzuela Convention Center (Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. up to 5 p.m.).

Pelayo said business owners can also go to the Business Service Centers located at the SM shopping mall in Las Piñas, the North Edsa mall in Quezon City, Megamall in Ortigas, Mall of Asia in Pasay, as well as other SM malls in Sta. Mesa, Fairview, Manila, Sucat, Bicutan, San Lazaro, and Makati.

A third option is to avail of the DTI National Capital Region's new courier service, made possible through a partnership with Air 21.

Business owners can call up Air 21 customer service representatives through its call center dedicated to business name applications at 855-8424.

Upon confirmation of the availment of service, an Air 21 authorized representative will pick up the application forms, required documents and fees from the residence of the applicants and turn them over to the Business Registration Center in Makati City, within 24 hours upon receipt of the forms.

Air 21 will thereafter deliver the approved business name applications, together with the DTI-issued official receipts to the applicants within 24 hours upon receipt of these documents at the DTI.

Pelayo also advised business owners to register online or download Business Name Application forms by logging in to www.dtincr.ph.

Another way to gain information on Business Name requirements and procedures is through SMS.

Text DTINCR to 2948 for Globe and Sun subscibers, and 3940 for Smart users.

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NOTICE TO THE MOTORING PUBLIC

Pursuant to DOTC Department Orders 2005-34 and 2005-37, the DOTC/LTO is mandated to efficiently and effectively implement the emission standards for motor vehicles as provided by the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999 through the implementation of the ***PETC-ITF Interconnectivity Project***.

The PETC-ITF Interconnectivity Project allows the interconnection between the PETC's and the existing DOTC/LTO Information Technology System (DOTC/LTO IT System). With a three-way matching capability, the PETC-ITF Interconnectivity Project permits online authentication with the LTO-IT System which immediately locks the Certificate of Emission Compliance (CEC) number to the accredited testing centers and the motor vehicle record, which would subsequently prevent the re-issuance of the CEC to another motor vehicle.

Effective **JANUARY 2, 2007**, the public is strongly advised to have their motor vehicle emission test processed by DTI Accredited and DOTC/LTO Authorized PETCs that are connected online and real time to the LTO-IT system and bearing this seal

REYNALDO I. BERROYA
Assistant Secretary
LAND TRANSPORTATION OFFICE

Lagi
Tayong
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Chief Executive Officer
Yehey.com

Mr. Jos Ortega
Chairman and CEO
Brandlab

Mr. Rene Espinosa
Managing Director
Porter & Miles, Inc

Mr. John Mangun
Managing Director
Aranca Research Phils., Inc.

Mr. Francis Jesse Rebustillo
Division Head for Classified Ads
Philippine Daily Inquirer

GUEST SPEAKER

Mr. Cecilio Pedro
President & CEO
Lamoiyan Corporation

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- Willing to travel
- Must have Driver's License with 1-2 restrictions

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Qualifications:
- Male/Female preferably not more than 30 years old
- College graduate
- With at least 2 years supervisory or managerial experience
- Must have Driver's License with 1-2 restrictions.
- Computer literate
- Excellent communication skills
- Experience in the motorcycle business is an edge
- Pro active and has proven work pressure tenacity

INTERNAL AUDITOR

Qualifications:
- Single, Male/Female preferably not more than 30 years old
- BS Accounting graduate
- Excellent communication skills
- Computer literate
- Willing to travel

SECRETARY/BOOKKEEPER

Qualifications:
- Single, Female, preferably not more than 30 years old
- BS Accounting graduate
- Computer literate
- Excellent communication skills

CREDIT INVESTIGATOR

Qualifications:
- Male, preferably not more than 30 years old
- With Driver's License with 1-2 restrictions
- Willing to travel
- Good in written and oral communication
- College graduate
- Those with experience in the motorcycle industry preferred

COLLECTORS

Qualifications:
- Male, preferably not more than 30 years old
- With Driver's License with 1-2 restrictions
- Willing to travel
- College graduate
- Those with experience in the motorcycle industry preferred

OFFICE CLERK

Qualifications:
- Female, preferably not more than 30 years old
- Graduate of business related course
- With at least 1 year related experience
- Computer literate

Successful applicants will be assigned to the following areas: Trece Martirez, Cavite, Dasmariñas, Cavite, Sucat, Parañaque City, Manila, Davao, Cebu, Cagayan de Oro City, Pinamalayan, Or. Mindoro

Applicants may email their resumé (bio-data)/pic, transcript of records & other credentials at:

MOTORCYCLE DIVISION
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Peacefully entered into eternal rest
on December 30, 2006
in Perpetual Succour Hospital, Cebu City.

Her remains will be brought to
Our Lady of Chartres Convent
#203 Provincial Road, Antipolo City
on January 3, 2007.

Burial is on Friday, January 5, 2007
at the Garden of Peace, Our Lady
of Chartres Convent
after the 2:30 P.M.
Eucharistic Celebration.

"I am the resurrection and life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever believes in Me will never die." ***John 11:25-26***

RESURRECCION FERNANDO "Rex" B. REYNA

of Candon, Ilocos Sur

(April 21, 1935 – December 30, 2006)
Peacefully joined our Creator on December 30, 2006
at the age of 71.

His loving wife **Martha**; sons and daughters-in-law **Valentino & Ester**, (†) **Christopher**, **Arthur** and **Ferdinand & Lalain**; grandchildren **Fernan John**, **Walter Evan**, **Kristen Valerie** and **Elyanna**; all relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at Chapel-G, La Funeraria Paz, Inc., located at G. Araneta Ave., Quezon City.

Interment will be on January 7, 2006 after the 9:00 a.m. Mass at Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina City.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies and whoever believes in Me will never die." John 11:25-26

*Goodbye **Mama Dora**, God has you in His keeping,*
but you will always be in our hearts.

TEODORA FURUC VDA. DE BUCAD

Died peacefully in the grace of our Lord
on December 30, 2006 at the age of 101.

Her bereaved daughters, **Petrona B. Lim**, **Josy B. Quinto** and **Catherine B. Martin**;
her son-in-law **Dr. Venancio Villarta**;
her grandchildren **Anthony, David, Edwin, Grace, Philip, Christopher, John, Frederick Lim, Jocelyn, Milagros, Alfred, Samuel Quinto, Oswaldo, Florencio, Justino, Jessica, Anselmo Martin Noel & Neil Villarta**.

Her nephews and nieces, relatives & friends request all pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie in state at the Capilla de San Francisco of Santuario de San Antonio Parish, McKinley Road, Forbes Park, Makati City.

In lieu of flowers, donations will be highly appreciated for the projects of SSAP Foundation, Inc.

Interment will take place on January 08, 2007 at the Heritage Park, Taguig City.

Time for the funeral Mass will be announced later.

DANILO FERNANDEZ REMO

(September 13, 1957- December 30, 2006)

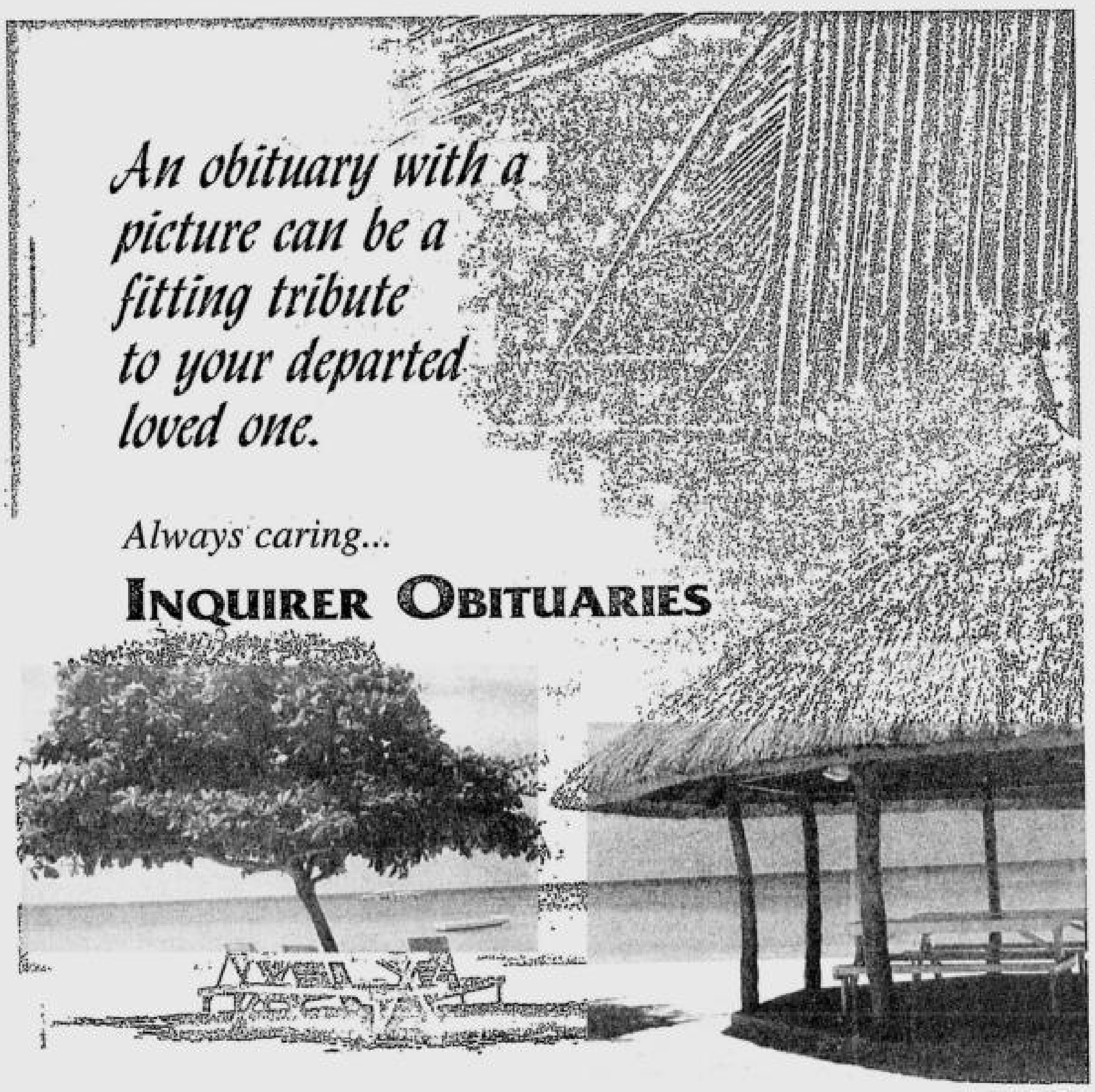
***DAN** peacefully joined his Creator*
on December 30, 2006 at the age of 49.

His loving wife, **JING**, and their son **DANIEL**, together with his father **BENJAMIN**, his mother, **LUVIMINDA**, his brothers, **VIC** and **ALEX**, his in-laws, nephews, nieces, other relatives and friends, and his brods in the **UP EPSILON CHI** Fraternity request the pious readers to join them in prayers for his eternal repose.

His remains lie in state at the St. Ignatius Village Chapel on Fordham Street, St. Ignatius Village, Quezon City.

Interment shall be on Wednesday, January 3, 2007 at the Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina, Metro Manila, after the 8:30 a.m. Mass at the St. Ignatius Village Chapel, Quezon City.

I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
John 14:6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RP tax structure 'not equitable'

Study says country's tax laws least progressive in SE Asia

By Michelle V. Remo

THE PHILIPPINES' INCOME TAX STRUCTURE is one of the least equitable in Southeast Asia, according to a study made by the National Tax Research Center (NTRC).

The NTRC said that if the country's individual income tax structure were to be compared with that of its neighbors, the Philippine version was not as progressive, and therefore one of the least equitable.

Progressivity in income taxation is manifested by an increase in the amount of income tax one has to pay as his or her income rises. Progressivity is often the goal of governments in designing the structure of its tax rates. This is normally deemed a measure of equity in taxation.

"Measuring the level of progressivity of a tax system, therefore, is important because this will eventually indicate how well the system redistributes the wealth among the populace," the NTRC said in its study.

NTRC is an attached agency of the Department of Finance tasked with conducting tax-related studies.

Under the Philippines' National Internal Revenue Code, the government imposes the following income tax rates for individual taxpayers: 5 percent for those earning P10,000 and below a year; 10 percent plus P500 for those earning between P10,000 and P30,000;

15 percent plus P2,500 for those earning between P30,000 and P70,000; P20 percent plus P8,500 for those earning between P70,000 and P140,000; 25 percent plus P22,500 for those earning between P140,000 and P250,000; 30 percent plus P50,000 for those earning between P250,000 and P500,000; and 32 percent plus P125,000 for those earning P500,00 and above.

NTRC said that of the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), Indonesia has the most progressive income tax structure.

The country with the lowest progressivity in terms of income tax structure is Malaysia. The Philippines lands second to Malaysia.

The NTRC said measuring progressivity in taxation takes into account two factors: accelerating increments in the tax rate, and the widening of the income interval for each successive income bracket.

Compared with the seven income brackets observed in the income tax structure in the Philippines, Indonesia's income tax structure only has five brackets.

Indonesia's tax structure is as follows: a 5-percent income tax rate for those earning 25 million rupiah and below; 10 percent plus 1.25 million rupiah for those earning between 25 million and 50 million rupiah; 15 percent plus 3.75 million rupiah for those earning between 50 million and 100 million rupiah; 25 percent plus 11.25 million rupiah for those earning between 100 million and 200 million rupiah; and 35 percent plus 36.25 million rupiah for those earning at least 200 million rupiah.

The Arroyo administration is pushing for a bill that will reorganize the country's individual income tax structure. The simplified net income tax bill is currently pending in Congress.

MWSS turns to rehab court to complete Maynilad deal

By Christine A. Gaylican

THE METROPOLITAN WATERWORKS AND Sewerage System has decided to turn to the rehabilitation court in an effort to prevent the three creditors of Maynilad Water Services Inc. from blocking the entry of a new major shareholder that will take over the west water concession.

The MWSS, as represented by the Office of the Government Corporate Counsel under Justice Agnes Devanadera, has requested the rehabilitation court to declare that the three creditors have forfeited their rights when they failed to submit their written consent within a prescribed period.

The creditors—Deutsche Bank, Avenue Asia and shareholder Suez Environment, formerly Ondeo Services—were supposed to submit their consent to the transfer of the government's stake in Maynilad to the new shareholder.

"On account of the unreasonable failure of the lenders ... to provide consent to assign MWSS' right and obligation to 83.97 percent equity in Maynilad to the winning bidder, (the creditors) are deemed to have waived their right to exercise their Clause 24 Consent, and the DCRA (debt and capital restructuring agreement) is deemed completely complied with," The MWSS said in a motion it filed before the Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 90.

The OGCC also pointed out that during negotiations, the lenders had unreasonably withheld their consent because "they wanted to be paid ahead of the other creditors."

Suez, which holds a 16-percent stake in Maynilad, is also considered a lender for shouldering part of the $120-million performance bond that was posted with the government.

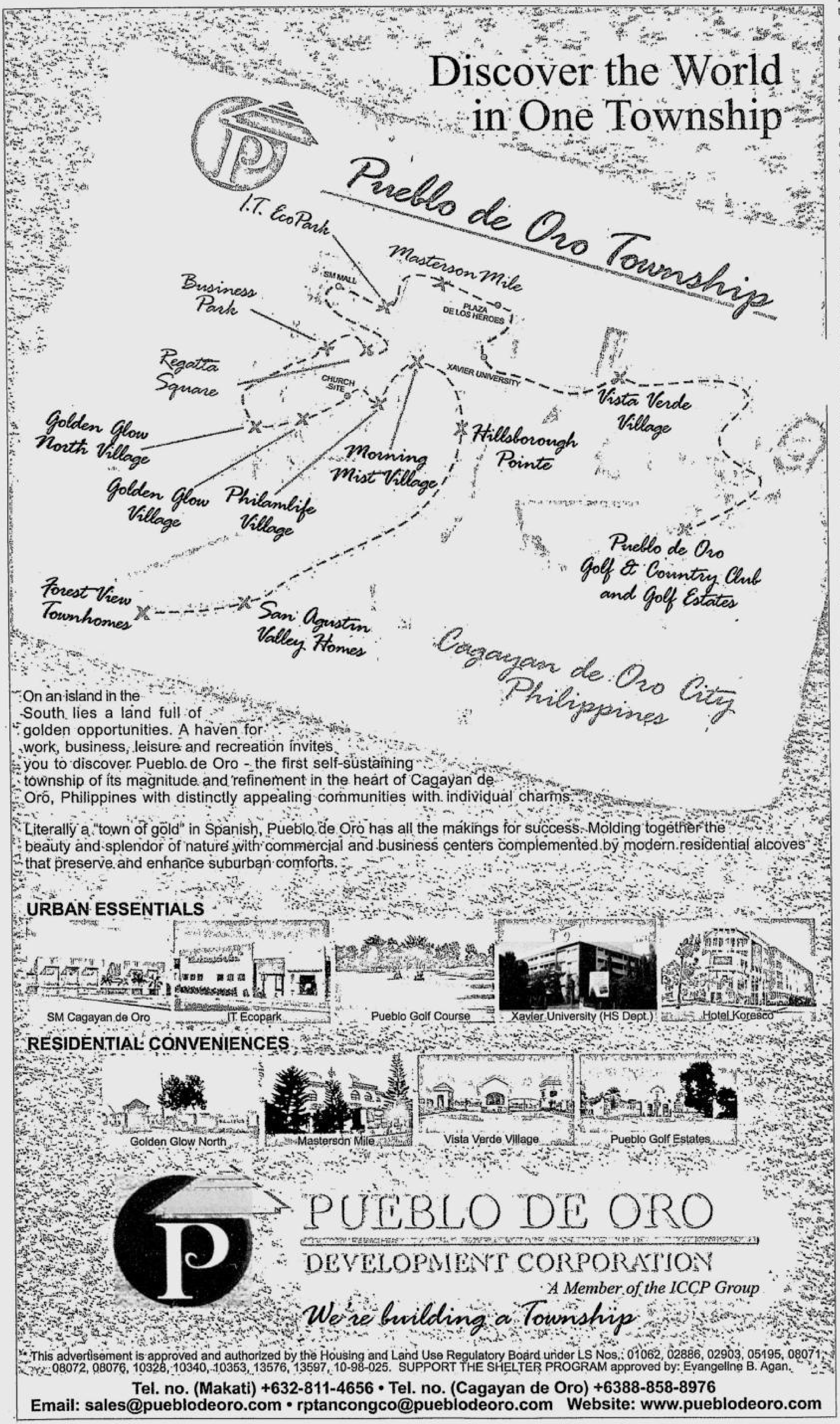
In the motion, Devanadera also urged the rehabilitation court under Judge Reynaldo B. Daway to heed the recommendation of the designated court receiver Rosario Bernaldo that the French shareholder Suez could no longer exercise its super minority rights indicated in the company by-laws of Maynilad.

"The company by-laws ... are no longer applicable upon completion and approval of the debt and capital restructuring agreement," the OGCC stated in its position.

Devanadera said that the government could find itself in a precarious position if it would not complete the process. If the turnover were to be delayed, it could force the winning bidder to withdraw its offer, and result in the failure of proceedings.

The DMCI-MPIC Water Company won the bid to continue operations of Manila's west zone for the remaining years of the 25-year concession.

The new concessionaire will be assuming Maynilad's obligations under a debt and capital restructuring agreement with the MWSS.



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Literally a "town of gold" in Spanish, Pueblo de Oro has all the makings for success. Molding together the beauty and splendor of nature with commercial and business centers complemented by modern residential alcoves that preserve and enhance suburban comforts.

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LIFESTYLE

Editor **Chelo Banal-Formoso**

sms feedback: inquirer life name/age/city/message to 2207 (Globe) and 386 (Smart) **or email us at** lifestyle@inquirer.com.ph

IN THIS ISSUE
RECONSTRUCT
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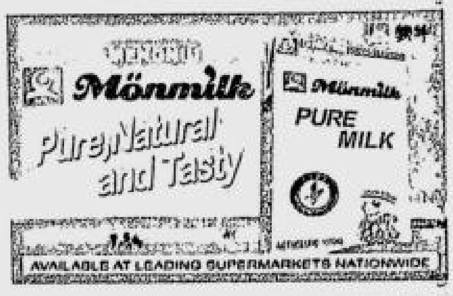
MONDAY **ARTS & BOOKS** ● TUESDAY **FITNESS** ● WEDNESDAY **2BU**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WELL AND GOOD

Tina Juan

The sound of fitness

HAVE YOU CAUGHT YOURSELF humming a song you heard at a party the night before or mindlessly tapping your foot to music on the radio even if you aren't really listening?

Music definitely has a way of getting under our skin. Scientists believe this is because we all have an inner rhythm that responds automatically to the beat of the music we hear.

The first sound a fetus "hears" is the mother's heartbeat and breathing pattern. We learn to move in sync with our environment through a sort of "neurological pacemaker" that links our central nervous system to external rhythms.

There is a saying among group exercise instructors that "music is the master," meaning it controls the motivation, speed and intensity of the class.

If the music is uplifting, invigorating and catchy, students will be inspired and motivated. If it drags, no matter how skilled the instructor, the class will be affected.

Science is affirming these observations with experiments on how music positively or negatively influences our workouts, whether exercise classes, lifting weights, running or walking.

Right tune

If you want to make the most of your exercise time, choose the right kind of music for your workout. Slow, relaxing music is excellent for stretching and mind-body formats like yoga, Pilates and tai chi but not for strength training.

A study that compared stimulating music, sedate music and silence while measuring grip strength found that slow music had a weakening effect. Participants were stronger when they listened to energetic music or no music at all.

However, not all kinds of vigorous music will work in your favor when you are pumping iron. Heavy metal music with an anapestic beat—a disruptive rhythm with extreme swings—can throw off your movement and tense up your body.

The best music for weightlifting seems to be dynamic music with even, rhythmical phrases and steady beat.

This is also best for aerobic exercise. In an experiment done with college students who expressed preference for hard rock, it was softer rock music that made them work out longer on a treadmill and feel better about the workout afterward.

Longer workout

Music can relieve the mental stress and boredom of long endurance workouts. Research participants who listened to music as they pedaled on stationary bikes worked out 27 percent longer compared to when they did it in silence. This is why many people use

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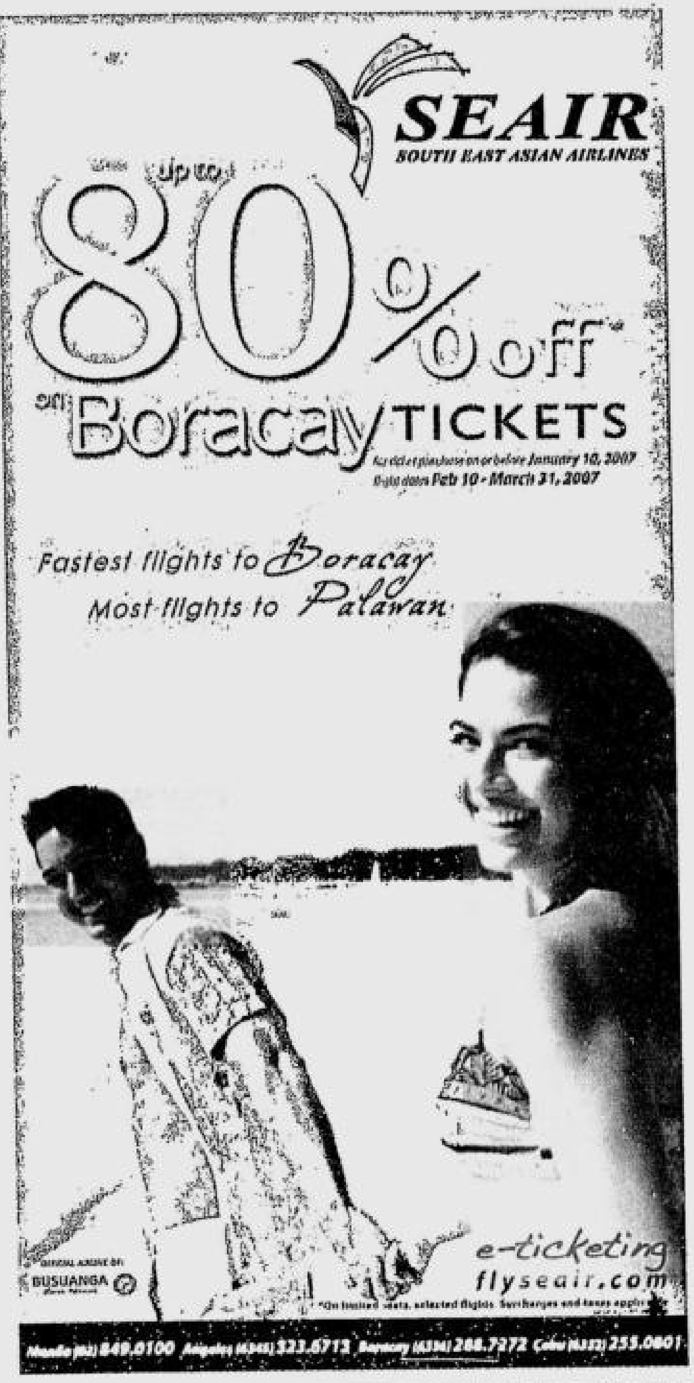
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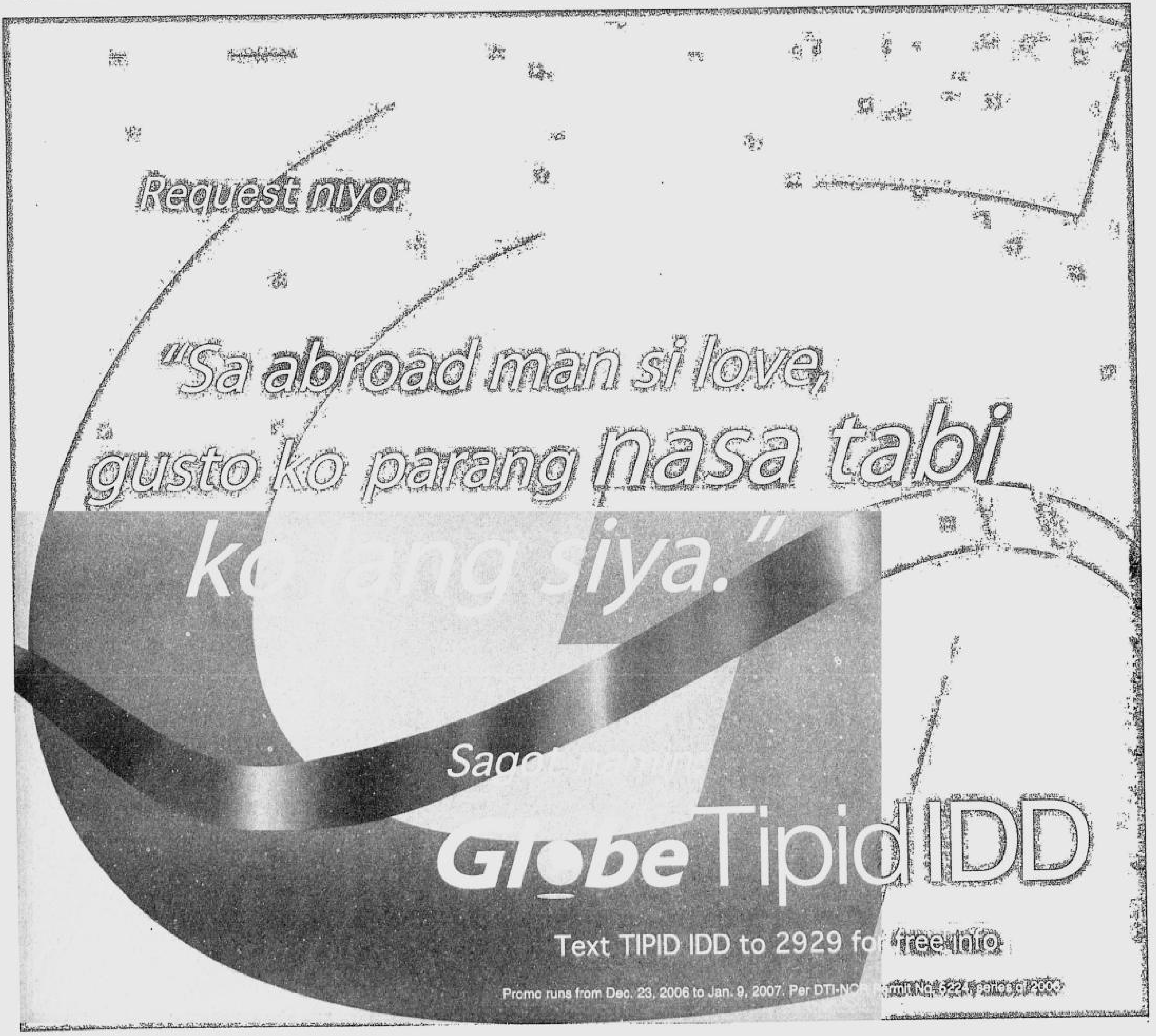
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Promo runs from Dec. 23, 2006 to Jan. 9, 2007. Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 6224, series of 2006

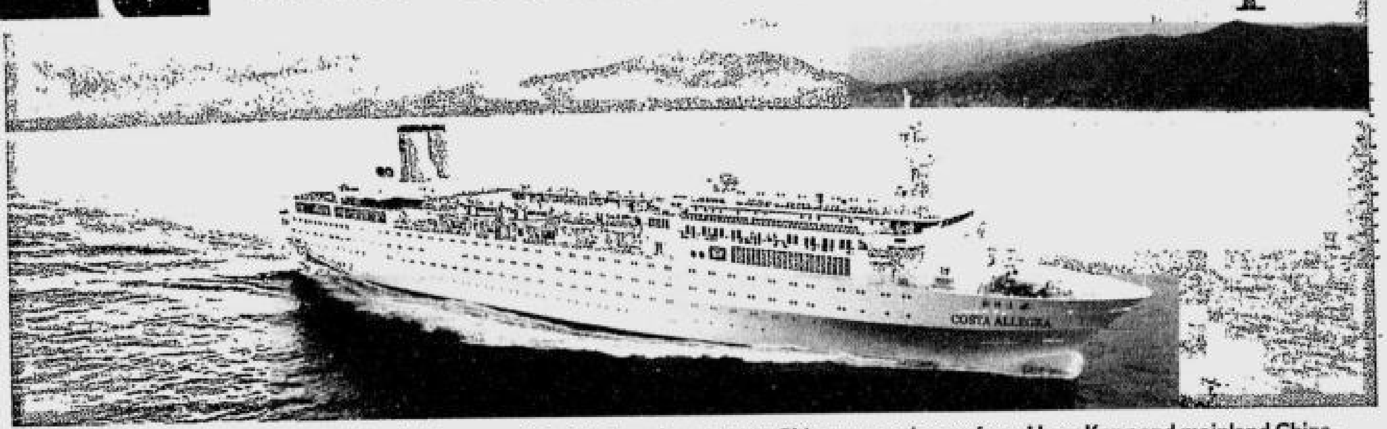
HONG Kong's mega socialite Bonnie Gokson (standing), who superbly organized the weekend cruise, with Gina Lopez and taipan Ollie Campos; Kim Acuna and husband Lito Camacho with CC Chen

BUSINESS tycoon Butch Campos, Evelyn Forbes and Valentine Willy

COSTA Crociere SPA chair Pier Luigi Foschi and Hong Kong's Victor Fung

INTERNATIONAL businessman Basil Ong with brilliant Vivienne Tan

The Orient cruise ship



THE COSTA Allegra, while maintaining its European flair, is tailored to cater to Chinese vacationers from Hong Kong and mainland China.

IN THE JACUZZI on board the Costa Allegra: Alessandra Perez Rubio, Carmen Delgado, Matthew and Zachary McAffee

WITHOUT BATTING AN EYELASH

Maurice Arcache

Photos by Alex Van Hagen using **Kodak** EasyShare system

THE ELEGANT COSTA ALLEGRA brings the glamour of traveling on a cruise ship to the orient, dahlings.

Owned and operated by Costa Crociere SPA, definitely one of the world's leading cruise companies, Costa Allegra was welcomed in Hong Kong like a grand celebrity.

She was all set for her maiden voyage to exciting Shanghai. As the first international cruise line to operate in China, Costa Crociere SPA, *naturellement*, invited tons of guests for a special, fun cruise.

Moi arrived in Hong Kong, together with Philippine Tatler editor in chief **Anton San Diego** and vivacious southern lady **Kim Acuna Camacho**, hotshot at Credit Suisse.

After **Lito C.** arrived from Singapore, we proceeded to board the ship docked at Hong Kong's Ocean Terminal.

The elegant Costa Allegra, which entered into service in 1992, is a 28,500-ton cruise ship that can carry 1,000 passengers. It has 400 comfortable cabins.

The ship was renovated and specifically tailored to cater to Chinese vacationers from Hong Kong and mainland China while maintaining its European flair.

Neoclassic

After the restyling, Costa Allegra now has a new eye-catching Italian neoclassic look particularly appreciated by Chinese, Japanese and Korean clients.

Joining the cruise from Hong Kong to Shanghai were **Micky Arison** and *el simpatico* **Pier Luigi Foschi**, chair and CEO of Costa Crociere SPA, dahlings.

The ship's staff, in smart suits, welcomed guests at the top of the red carpet, with flutes of champagne. Other crew members escorted us to our respective cabins.

That night, 300 of Hong Kong's hottest society and business namedroppables, taipans and international personalities were invited onboard for an elegant sit-down dinner at the chi-chi restaurant on Deck 6, *après* cocktails.

The superbly prepared six-course Italian dinner lasted till 11:30 p.m., when Hong Kong guests not joining the cruise disembarked. Some of us decided to check out some of Hong Kong's hottest night spots.

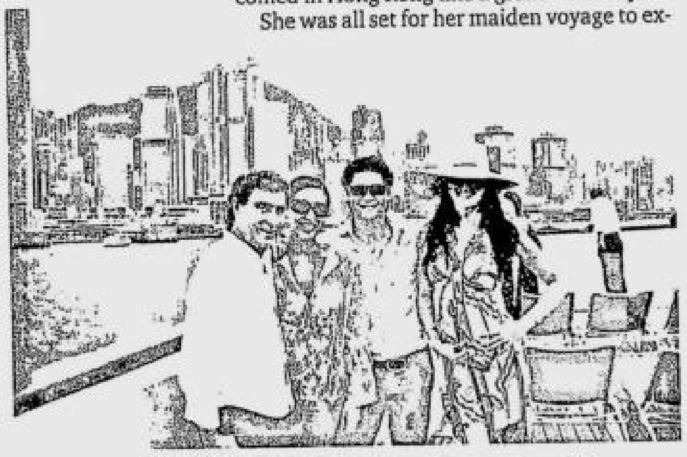
Last-minute shopper

Next morning, breakfast was at the Yacht Club at Deck 7. **Anton S.D.** jumped ship and did some last-minute shopping at the supermarket in the Ocean Terminal for some junk food, which were not sold onboard.

We also welcomed gorgeous pals **Audrey Pucket Chiu** and **Felisa Atienza**, who came with some of Hong Kong's young, chic newguards, headed by vivacious and stylish headturner **Bonnie Gokson** and adorable shipping heiress **Linda Magsaysay Ho McAffee**.

The cruise brought together the creamiest of the cream from Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Korea and Thailand.

By the way, Bonnie G., in collaboration with Occasions PR & Marketing Ltd., was the tireless overall conceptual planner and pro-



MOI, Fely Atienza, Tatler's Anton San Diego and Audrey Chiu

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tipid sa gastos,
'di sa kulitxtan."
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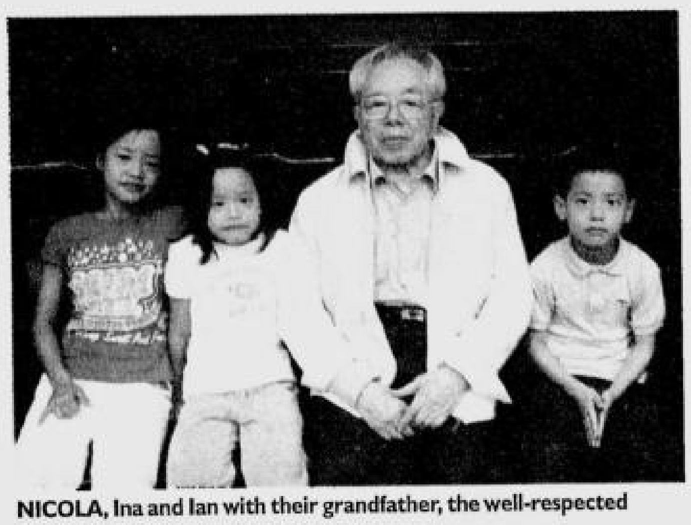


NICOLA, Ina and Ian with their grandfather, the well-respected Robert Ho

MCAFFEE *FAMILLE*: Matthew, dad Gage McAffee, Zachary, mother Linda Magsaysay Ho McAffee, and Zachary's girlfriend, Carmen Delgado

THE FAB Yujuico clan: Danela, Iya, Manika, Jody, business magnate Joey and his wife Joji

HONG Kong's vivaciously adorable Reyna H. with her husband, international hotelier Mahesh Harilela; and businessman Bobby Cuenca

CARNIVAL PLC CEO and board chair, Micky Arison

HK high society's woman of substance, Alice Chiu

OLD-WEALTH society women: Doña Nellie Delgado and Doña Ning Baga

A SYMPHONY orchestra greets invitees as they board the ship.

ducer of this really one-of-a-kind happening, dahlings.

It was wonderful to see such greats as **Anita Magsaysay Ho**, with her daughters **Doris Ho**, CEO of the Magsaysay Group of Companies; **Helen H. Delgado** and **Linda H. McAffee**, director of Faimont Shipping & Magsaysay Group and managing director and co-founder of ShipServ.; the Peninsula Manila's adorable **Evelyn Lim Forbes**; All City Management chair, brilliant **Basil Ong**; **Joselito Yujuico** and his beautiful *famille*; **Jose Isidro Camacho**, managing director of Credit Swiss's investment banking division based in Singapore; financial whiz **Moses Tsang**; taipan **Walter Kwok** and his wife **Wendy**; Carnival PLC CEO and board chair **Micky Arison**, who is No. 94 in Forbes' World's Richest list this year; hotelier and business tycoon **Mahesh Harilela** and his glamorous wife, Manille girl **Reyna Hiranand**; ABS-CBN Foundation managing director **Gina Lopez**; chair of Nutri Asia Inc. **Butch Campos** and his wife, statuesque and exotic **Ollie Mabanta**, plus so many others like them.

Some were de-stressing by doing tai chi, attending a fortune-telling class, checking out the casino and enjoying the swinging musical stage shows and other fun and interesting activities, as well as the sumptuous food served in the different restos of the chi-chi ship.

After three wonderful days, we arrived in Shanghai with a bang! After disembarking, the group dashed to the renowned Mei Long Zheng Restaurant for lunch hosted by that gentleman of gentlemen, **Robert Ho**.

Then it was time to shop, which included going to the chic, must-checkout store simply called Cocoon & Ciococo, The Ancient Art of Comfort, where you will find the best of the best. It's owned by that lady who always wears cashmere and gorgeous silk plus a smile, **Helen Ho Delgado**.

Extravaganza

The highlight of the trip was the Shanghai extravaganza at the pier, which started promptly at 8 p.m. after cocktails, with the skyline of Pudong and the Bund as backdrop. One thousand invited guests from Shanghai and the ship passengers watched and were completely mesmerized with the "Italian cheerfulness" of the spectacular show created by **Valerio Festi**, the Italian genius who staged the 2006 Turin Winter Olympics celebration.

After a restful, fun-filled cruise we jetted back to Manille. Costa Allegra will be sailing from Shanghai for its regular five-day itinerary, with stopovers in Nagasaki, Japan; and Cheju Island, Korea.

Hong Kong will be her mother port during the winter season, dahlings.

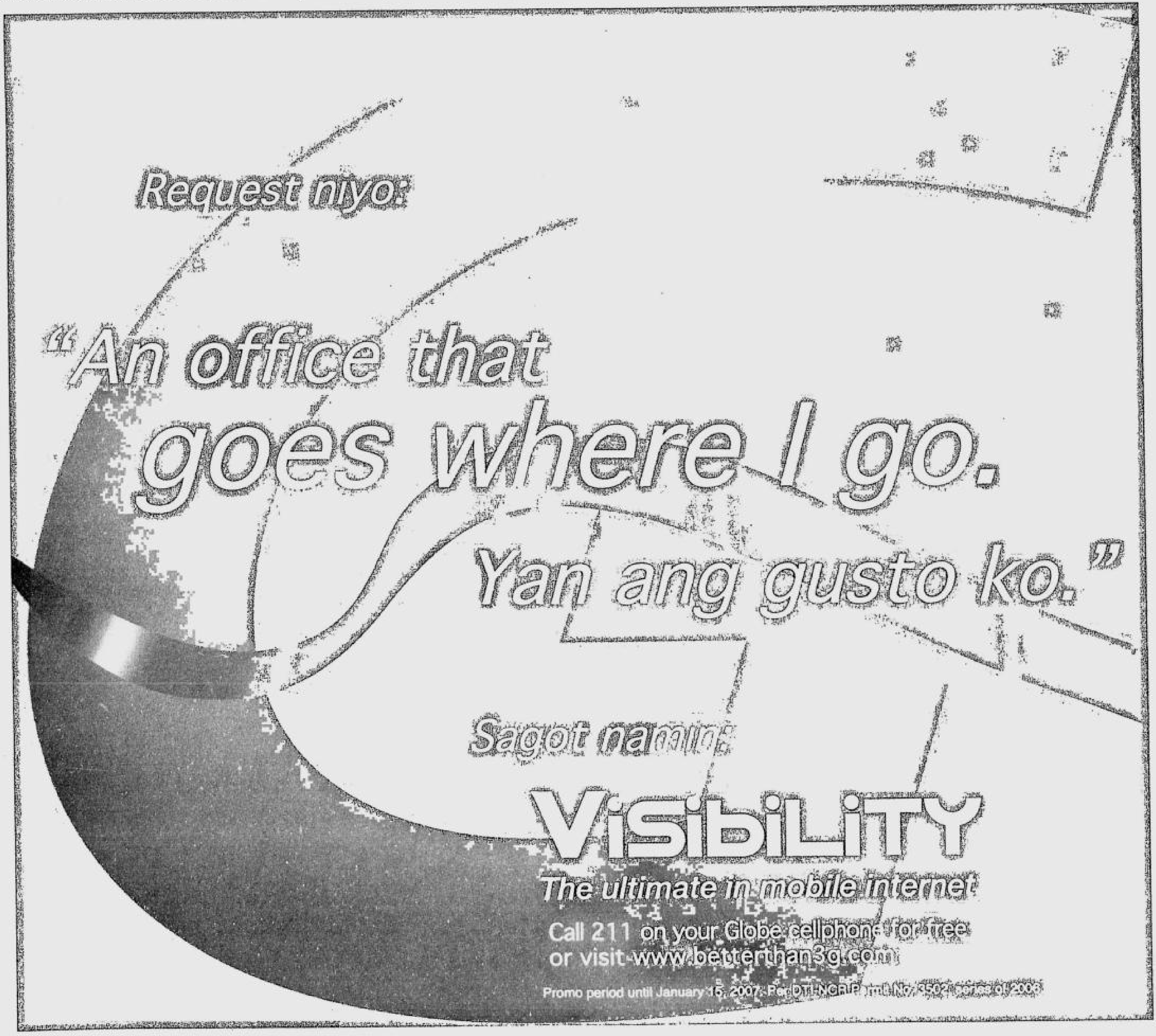
It definitely was an awesome experience, *palanggas*, sailing to some of Asia's exotic destinations Italian-style, no less, on the oh-so-chic, *bellissima* Costa Allegra.

For more info, do call Occasions PR & Marketing Ltd. in HK. Look for **Grace Mao** or **Vijo Lee**, tel. 25237666; fax 28106598; or e-mail gmao@occhk.com or vijo@occhk.com.

ANITA Magsaysay and husband Robert Ho

HONG KONG-BASED young couple: businessman Anthony Hotung and his wife, gorgeous Wendy Puyat

HELEN Magsaysay Ho Delgado in front of her chic Shanghai boutique



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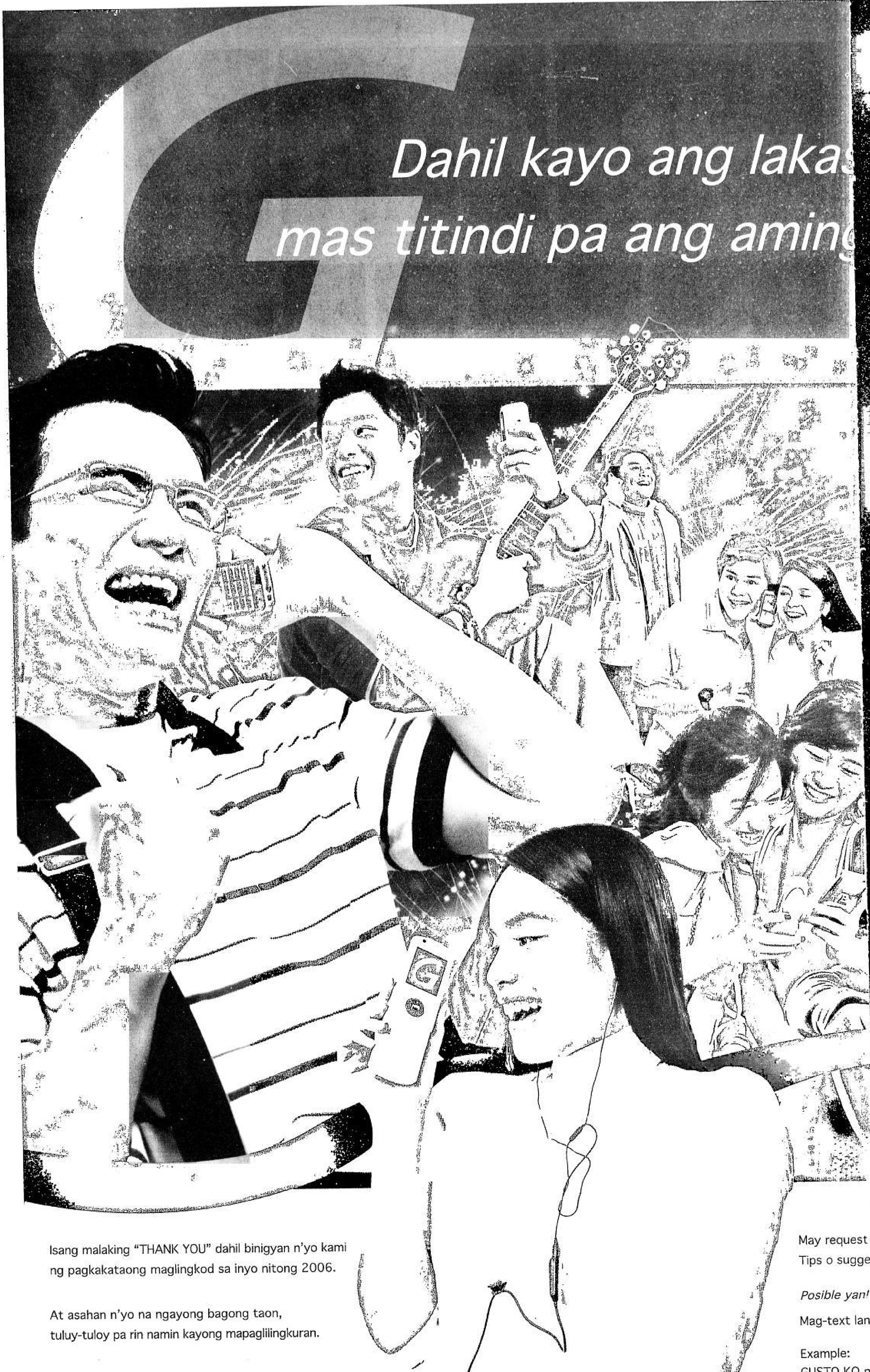

Dahil kayo ang lakas
mas titindi pa ang aming
G

Isang malaking "THANK YOU" dahil binigyan n'yo kami ng pagkakataong maglingkod sa inyo nitong 2006.

At asahan n'yo na ngayong bagong taon, tuluy-tuloy pa rin namin kayong mapaglilingkuran.

May request
Tips o sugge

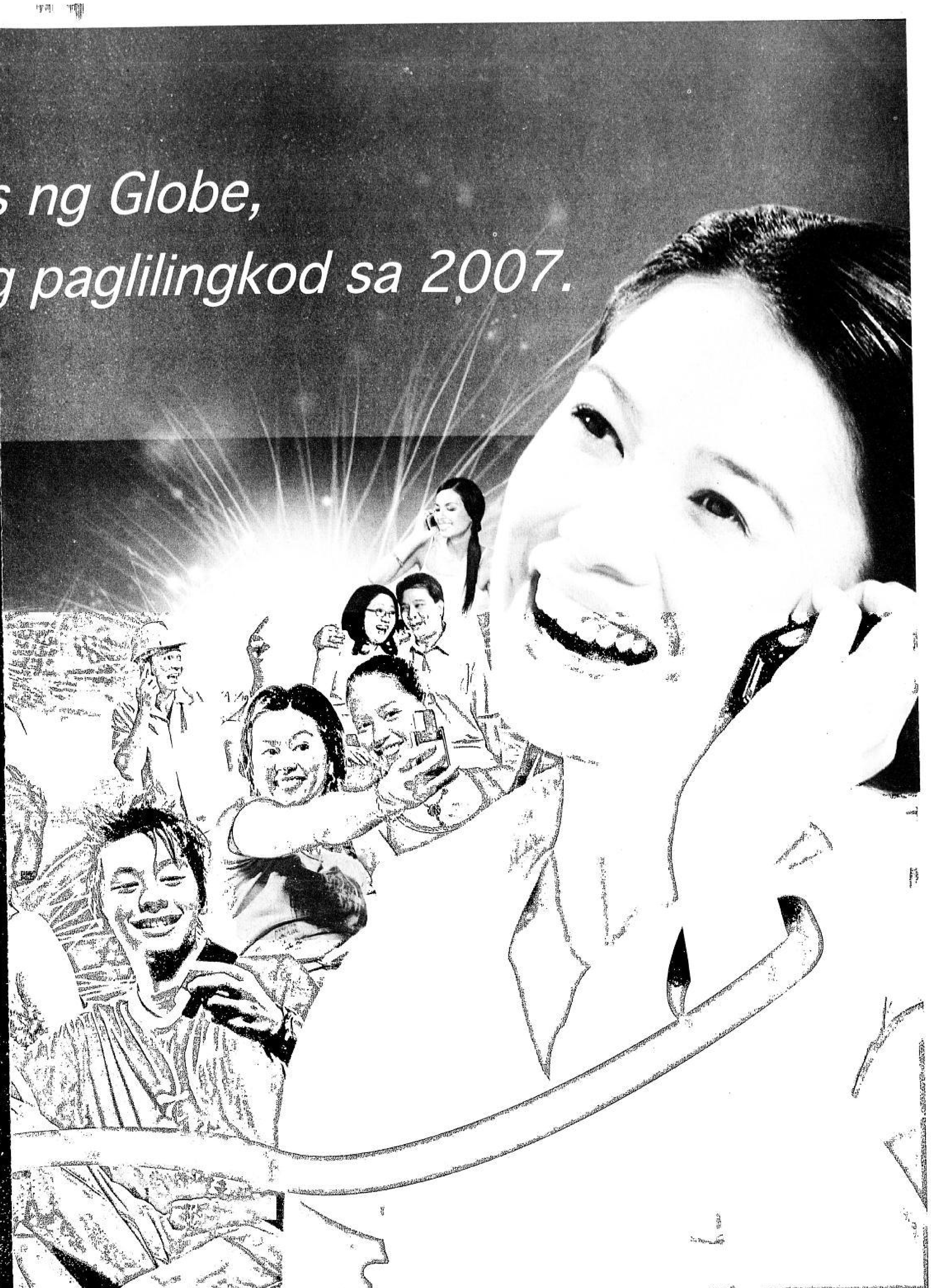
Posible yan!

Mag-text lan

Example:
GUSTO KO n

*Maximum of 151

s ng Globe,
g paglilingkod sa 2007.



a po kayo?
tions para mas gumanda pa ang aming serbisyo?

ng GUSTO KO <your requests>* to 2363.

mas makulay na daily logos

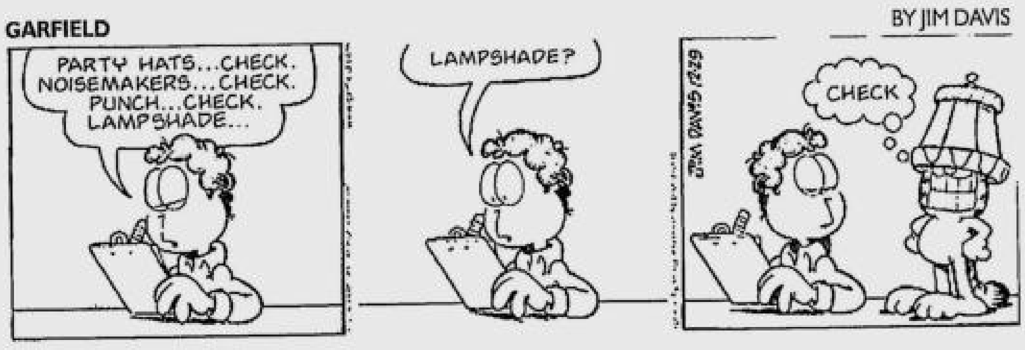
aracters. Valid from Jan. 1 to 3, 2007 only.

ang lakas mo sa

Globe

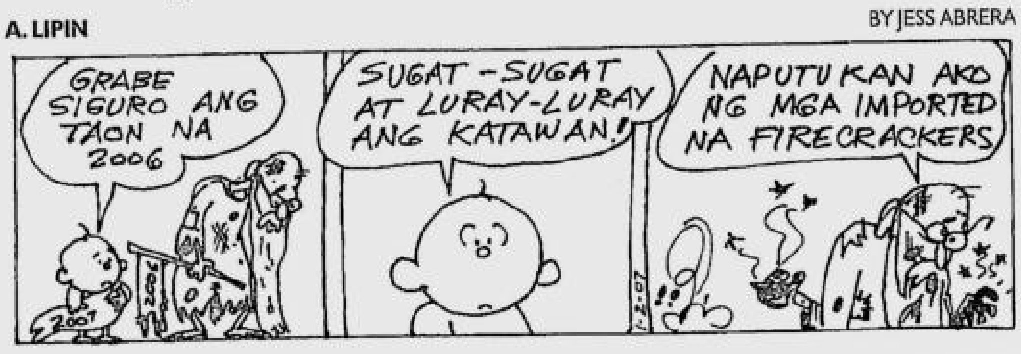
GARFIELD

BY JIM DAVIS


PARTY HATS...CHECK. NOISEMAKERS...CHECK. PUNCH...CHECK. LAMPSHADE...
LAMPSHADE?
CHECK
JIM DAVIS 12-29

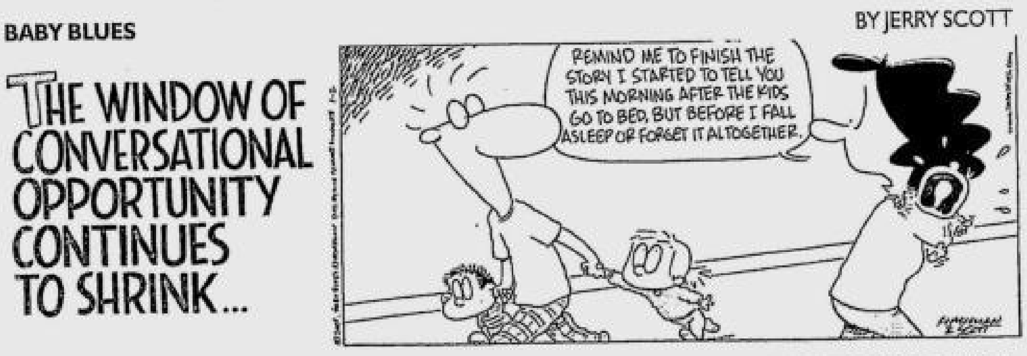
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


GRABE SIGURO ANG TAON NA 2006
2007
2006
SUGAT-SUGAT AT LURAY-LURAY ANG KATAWAN!
1-2-07
NAPUTUKAN AKO NG MGA IMPORTED NA FIRECRACKERS

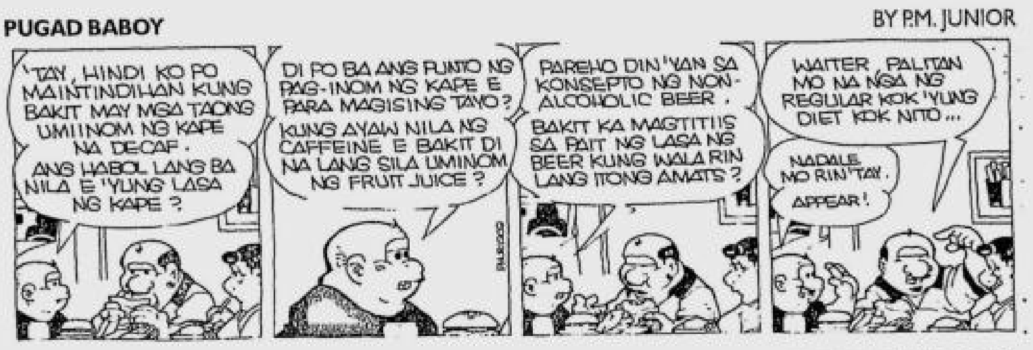
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


THE WINDOW OF CONVERSATIONAL OPPORTUNITY CONTINUES TO SHRINK...
REMIND ME TO FINISH THE STORY I STARTED TO TELL YOU THIS MORNING AFTER THE KIDS GO TO BED, BUT BEFORE I FALL ASLEEP OR FORGET IT ALTOGETHER.
KIRKMAN & SCOTT

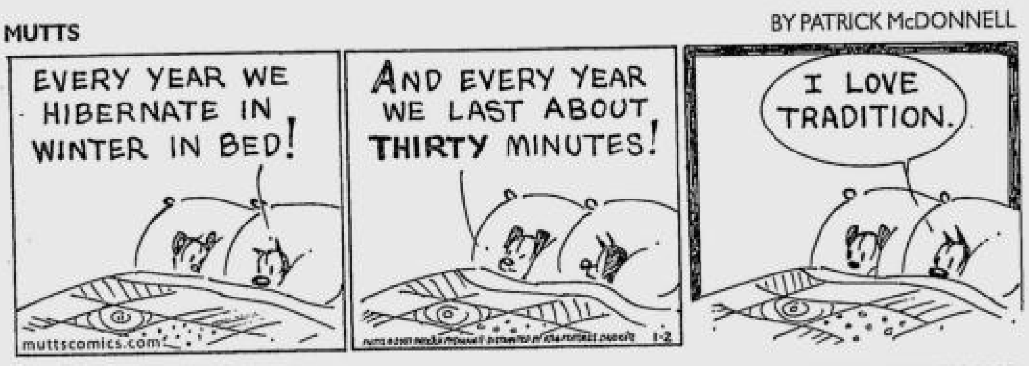
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


'TAY, HINDI KO PO MAINTINDIHAN KUNG BAKIT MAY MGA TAONG UMIINOM NG KAPE NA DECAF.
ANG HABOL LANG BA NILA E 'YUNG LASA NG KAPE ?
DI PO BA ANG PUNTO NG PAG-INOM NG KAPE E PARA MAGISING TAYO ?
KUNG AYAW NILA NG CAFFEINE E BAKIT DI NA LANG SILA UMINOM NG FRUIT JUICE ?
PAREHO DIN 'YAN SA KONSEPTO NG NON-ALCOHOLIC BEER.
BAKIT KA MAGTITIIS SA PAIT NG LASA NG BEER KUNG WALA RIN LANG ITONG AMATS ?
WAITER, PALITAN MO NA NGA NG REGULAR KOK 'YUNG DIET KOK NITO...
NADALE MO RIN 'TAY.
APPEAR!

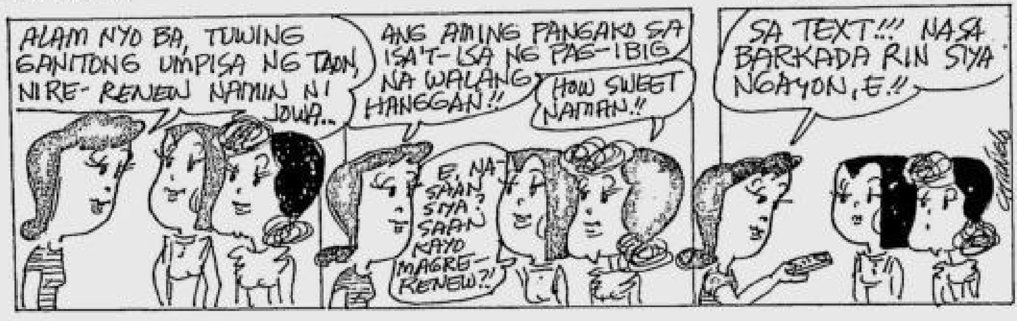
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


EVERY YEAR WE HIBERNATE IN WINTER IN BED!
AND EVERY YEAR WE LAST ABOUT THIRTY MINUTES!
I LOVE TRADITION.
muttscomics.com
1-2

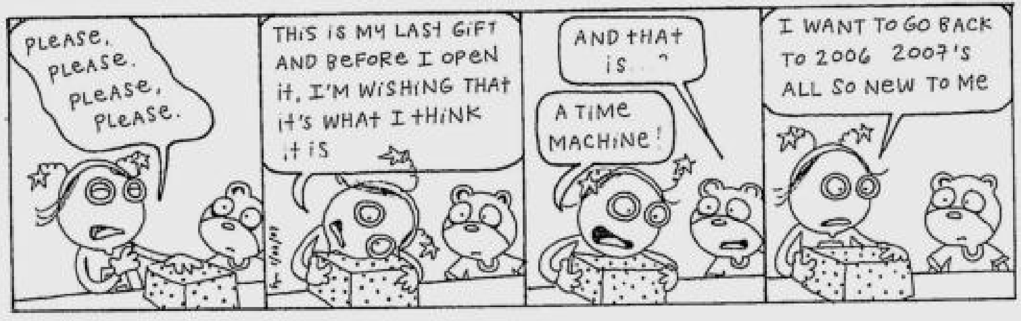
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


ALAM NYO BA, TUWING GANITONG UMPISA NG TAON, NIRE-RENEW NAMIN NI JOWA..
ANG AMING PANGAKO SA ISA'T-ISA NG PAG-IBIG NA WALANG HANGGAN!!
HOW SWEET NAMAN!!
E, NASAAN SIYA? SAAN KAYO MAGRE-RENEW?!
SA TEXT!!! NASA BARKADA RIN SIYA NGAYON, E.!!

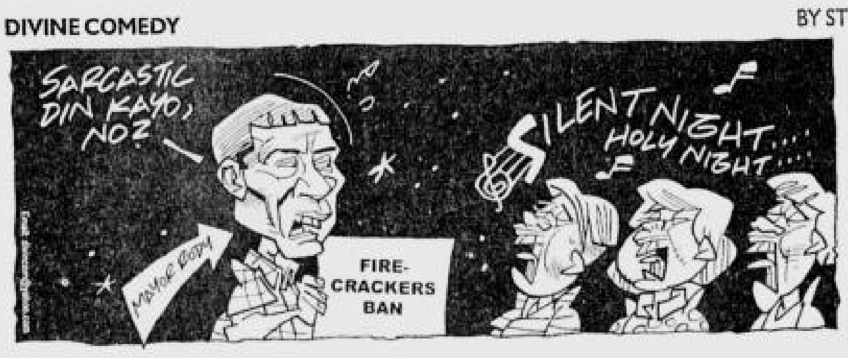
ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


PLEASE, PLEASE. PLEASE, PLEASE.
THIS IS MY LAST GIFT AND BEFORE I OPEN IT, I'M WISHING THAT IT'S WHAT I THINK IT IS
AND THAT IS...
A TIME MACHINE!
I WANT TO GO BACK TO 2006 2007'S ALL SO NEW TO ME

DIVINE COMEDY

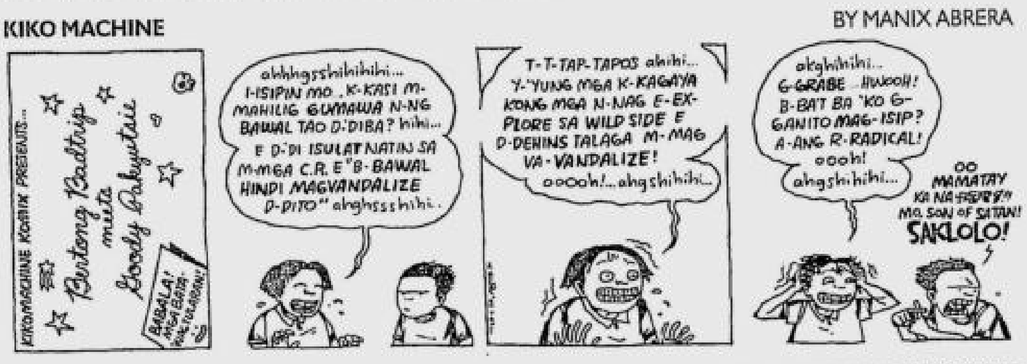
BY STEVEN PABALINAS


SARCASTIC DIN KAYO, NO?
MAYOR RODY
FIRE-CRACKERS BAN
SILENT NIGHT.... HOLY NIGHT....

NEW YEAR'S EVE IN DAVAO CITY

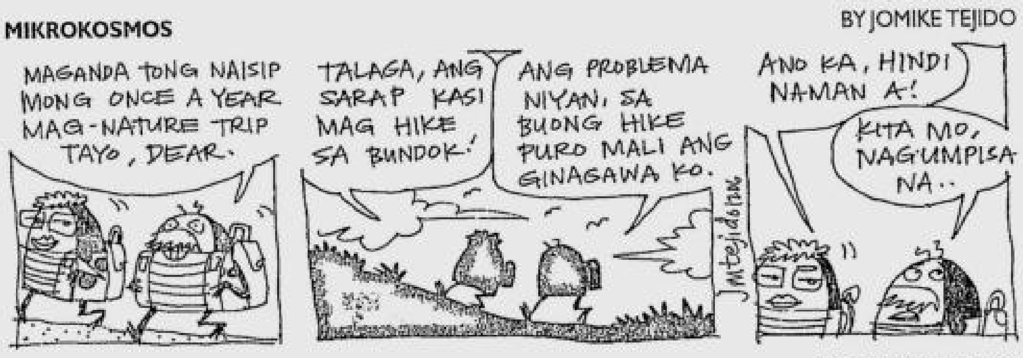
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


KIKOMACHINE KOMIX PRESENTS...
Buntong Badtrip meets Goody Bakyutiie
BABALA!
ahhhgsshihihihi... I-ISIPIN MO, K-KASI M-MAHILIG GUMAWA N-NG BAWAL TAO D-DIBA? hihi... E D-DI ISULAT NATIN SA M-MGA C.R. E "B-BAWAL HINDI MAGVANDALIZE D-DITO" ahghssshihi.
T-T-TAP-TAPOS ahihi... Y-'YUNG MGA K-KAGAYA KONG MGA N-NAG E-EXPLORE SA WILD SIDE E D-DENINS TALAGA M-MAG VA-VANDALIZE! ooooh!...ahgshihihi...
ahghihihi... G-GRABE... IIWOOH! B-BAT BA 'KO G-GANITO MAG-ISIP? A-ANG R-RADICAL! oooh! ahgshihihi...
OO MAMATAY KA NA MO, SON OF SATAN! SAKLOLO!

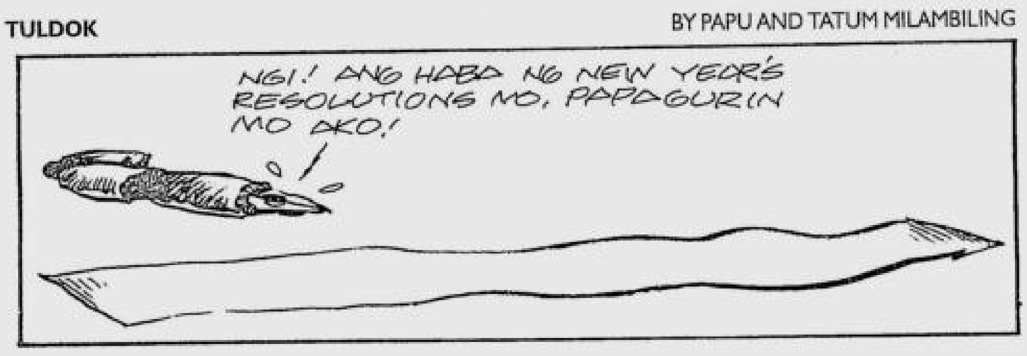
MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


MAGANDA 'TONG NAISIP MONG ONCE A YEAR MAG-NATURE TRIP TAYO, DEAR.
TALAGA, ANG SARAP KASI MAG HIKE SA BUNDOK!
ANG PROBLEMA NIYAN, SA BUONG HIKE PURO MALI ANG GINAGAWA KO.
jmtejido
ANO KA, HINDI NAMAN A!
KITA MO, NAGUMPISA NA..

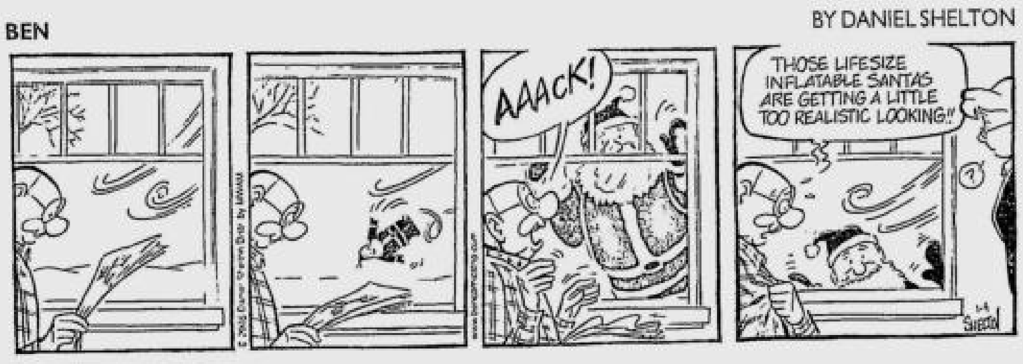
TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


NGI! ANG HABA NG NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS MO, PAPAGURIN MO AKO!

BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


AAACK!
THOSE LIFESIZE INFLATABLE SANTAS ARE GETTING A LITTLE TOO REALISTIC LOOKING!!
SHELTON

DAILY CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	■	5	6	7	8	■	9	10	11	12	13
14				■	15				■	16				
17				18					19					
20						■	21				■	22		
■	■	■	23			24	■	25			26			
27	28	29		■	30		31	■	32			■	■	■
33			■	34				35	■	36		37	38	39
40			41						42					
43					■	44					■	45		
■	■	■	46		47	■	48			■	49			
50	51	52				53	■	54		55		■	■	■
56			■	57			58	■	59			60	61	62
63			64					65						
66					■	67				■	68			
69					■	70				■	71			

By James E. Buell
Edgewater, FL
1/2/07

ACROSS
1 Scrambled dish
5 Caked deposit
9 Gloomy
14 Hammer part
15 Fabled loser
16 Weird
17 Screen cowboy
20 Reveal oneself
21 Roosevelt Island's river
22 So-so grade
23 Play post office
25 Dancer's garb
27 Milk byproduct
30 "Weird Al" Yankovic movie
32 2nd-largest continent
33 Broadcast
34 Makes airtight
36 Vowel string
40 Marc Price on "Family Ties"
43 Anne of "Six Days, Seven Nights"
44 To your health!
45 Tail-gunner's position
46 Galley tool
48 Dawn goddess
49 Retort to "Are not!"
50 Three-time Wimbledon champion
54 The one there
56 Coach Parseghian
57 Singer Aimee
59 Tongue-in-cheek
63 Rolling Stones hit
66 Nickel add-on?
67 Imploded Atlanta arena
68 Actress Kedrova
69 Trip odometer button
70 Hankerings
71 Musher's ride

DOWN
1 Reverberation
2 Soggy, unappetizing food
3 Look aghast
4 Posh
5 Chinese-American dish
6 Flowed
7 Strong impulse
8 Decorative sticker
9 The tops
10 Brown with a band
11 Writer Jong
12 One who helped out
13 Attuned
18 Him in Italy
19 Under sail
24 Persian rulers
26 Woods rooter?
27 Laundry
28 Raise sharply
29 Cartman of "South Park"
31 Snow unit
34 Gum flavor
35 Schnoz
37 Islamic scholar
38 Galoots
39 Golden rule preposition
41 Loudness unit
42 Loose African garments
47 Horse color
49 Coral rings
50 Field of study
51 Raw
52 Chair designer
53 Get off on
55 Comics bark
58 One of renown
60 Stud fastener
61 Land in the sea
62 Libya neighbor
64 "The Gold Bug" penner
65 BBC World alternative

Monday's Puzzle Solved

M	O	L	A	R	■	D	R	E	W	■	B	E	B	E
E	R	O	D	E	■	I	T	E	R	■	A	R	A	L
N	E	G	E	V	■	V	E	R	I	T	A	B	L	E
■	■	■	S	I	L	O	■	I	T	A	L	I	A	N
L	O	B	■	E	A	R	■	E	E	R	■	U	T	A
A	M	E	O	W	Y	C	H	R	I	S	T	M	A	S
N	A	T	O	■	S	E	E	■	N	A	W	■	■	■
D	R	A	M	A	■	E	N	C	■	L	E	M	O	N
■	■	■	P	B	S	■	R	O	N	■	R	A	K	E
A	N	D	H	A	P	P	Y	N	E	W	P	U	R	R
P	E	A	■	S	E	A	■	T	O	O	■	L	A	D
P	E	R	C	E	N	T	■	E	N	O	S	■	■	■
E	D	W	A	R	D	I	A	N	■	D	U	P	E	S
A	L	I	T	■	E	N	I	D	■	Y	E	A	S	T
L	E	N	S	■	R	A	M	S	■	S	T	R	A	Y

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1/2/07

HOROSCOPE

YOU BORN TODAY: Yours is a hard-working sign, and you're very dedicated to whatever you choose to embrace. You have very high standards for yourself and often take on huge projects or big areas of responsibility. Fortunately, most of you work better under pressure. You have a great imagination. In this coming year, you will have to make an important choice. Choose wisely.

Birthdate of: Kate Bosworth, actress; Taye Diggs, actor; Isaac Asimov, author

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): Bosses, parents and authority figures in your life will likely surprise you today. This could be an opportunity for you to take your life in an entirely new direction. Bonus!

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): Sudden opportunities to travel or to further your education or training in some way might fall in your lap today. This window of opportunity will be brief; therefore, you will have to act quickly.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Gifts, goodies, bonuses or favors from others could come your way today. In some manner, you stand to benefit from the wealth of others.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): Friendships and partnerships might take on a new spin. Casual relationships could become committed ones. Other relationships might fly apart. (It's a crapshoot.)

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Unexpected news related to your job is likely. You might explore new avenues of technology. Coworkers could be a source of surprise and excitement. ("She did what?")

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): Your luck factor is high today. Opportunities to socialize, take a little vacation or explore the arts are likely. New love can begin now. If so, it will be with someone who is quite different from you.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): You might introduce some new high-tech gadgets or products to your home today. You want to modernize things. You also want to break free from restrictions and the same old way of doing something.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): You feel restless and eager for adventure today. Your mind is jumping from topic to topic. News from or about a sibling might catch you off guard.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Financial matters are unpredictable now. You might find money; you might lose money. Spontaneous purchases are likely. An unexpected job offer might appear. If so, act quickly.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): You feel alert, lively and quick-witted today. You're up for anything. Others will find you socially entertaining; in part, this is because you feel rebellious and bold!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): You feel restless today. You don't want anyone telling you what to do. In particular, large organizations and institutions will feel stifling

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): You might meet a real character today. Alternatively, someone you already know might do something bizarre. It's not a boring day.

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

by Dave Green

		8			5			1
	7			8			6	
3			2			9		
		3			2			6
	1			4			3	
7			5			8		
		6			1			7
	2			3			8	
5			9			3		

Difficulty Level ★★
1/02

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HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

1	3	9	6	5	4	7	2	8
6	7	2	8	9	3	5	1	4
4	8	5	7	1	2	9	3	6
2	9	6	4	8	7	3	5	1
8	5	1	2	3	9	4	6	7
3	4	7	5	6	1	2	8	9
5	2	8	9	4	6	1	7	3
7	1	4	3	2	8	6	9	5
9	6	3	1	7	5	8	4	2

Difficulty Level ★

INNER AWARENESS
Jaime T. Licauco

St. Benedict's medal, coincidences, etc.

HERE ARE SOME INTERESTING questions from readers and an e-mail writer.

I was born a Catholic and I still consider myself as one, but there are certain doctrines of the Church I cannot reconcile with my beliefs. For one, I believe in the pre-existence of souls, the bedrock on which the idea of reincarnation is founded.

In your column of Dec. 19 you mentioned that a person could protect her/himself from demonic spirits by wearing "a protective object in your body, like the St. Benedict's medal that's been empowered or blessed in the proper ritual by a Benedictine priest authorized to do so."

Wouldn't that be like asking for the help of a soul who may at present be occupying a warm body and who may himself be in need of help to correct a karmic debt? Sainthood seems to have been bestowed by the Church in ancient days on the basis of political influence or pressures, just as the papacy was, though St. Benedict might be one of the few exceptions. Just curious.

S.G. SEGADOR

Thank you for your reaction to my recent column and for your interest in my work. Like you, I struggled with the Catholic teachings I was raised in and my later discoveries about the true nature of reality.

I see no conflict or contradiction. What we are talking about here is subtle but powerful psychic energy. One can empower an object with certain qualities to protect, heal or guide a person.

The medal of St. Benedict has been empowered by the early Church to protect its wearer against demonic possessions, snake poisons and even calamities. He does not have to call on St. Benedict for that.

Japanese researcher Mr. Emoto has proved anyone can also empower ordinary water for healing or protection or for some other purpose.

Synchronicity

Here's a question from Ricky (not his real name):

I would just like to ask your opinion regarding an incident at Landmark, Makati. I was on the fourth floor and I saw our neighbor.

I was not in the mood to strike a conversation, so I decided to avoid him (he did not notice me). I went down to the supermarket. As I was paying at the counter, I once again noticed him standing in front of me. Still I was not in the mood to talk. I decided to move to another counter (he was still not aware of my presence).

About 30 minutes later, after eating with my wife at the food court, I went to the package counter to get our bags. This time I found our neighbor sitting near the area. Finally, 60 minutes later, we arrived home and, after entering our gate, I noticed a car pull over next to our house. Guess who it was?

Events like this do not happen often. Is this what you call serendipity? Is there something paranormal about this incident? What lessons can I learn here? Or should I just simply forget everything and treat it as just another day in the mall?

RICKY

The series of coincidences you mentioned is, indeed, very interesting and intriguing. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung called such events synchronicity, not serendipity, which is similar to it.

Synchronicity was defined by Jung as "the simultaneous occurrence of two unrelated but meaningful events." Serendipity, on the other hand, means "finding something you need but not the one you are looking for."

Bumping into your neighbor four times in one day is indeed strangely curious. The meaning of such meetings may become clear to you in the coming days.

It is possible there really is something you two need to talk about, or to settle, or to do together. I don't know. But since I don't believe in accidents or coincidences, I believe the meaning of such meetings will reveal itself at some future date.

Just be alert or be aware of the signs or signals.

Intrigued

Here's an e-mail from Jhoanna of Cagayan de Oro:

I just finished reading your book on soulmates, karma and reincarnation. I am so intrigued with the concepts you presented that I am torn between belief and disbelief.

Anyway, as you mentioned, you were the "Golden One" and you said the people we met in this lifetime were also the people we met in the past. It made me wonder who I was then.

You had a very important role as the Golden One in the past. Where could we have met before that made us meet again in this lifetime? (I am asking you this question and yet I am scared that you might give me answers... Do I make sense?)

JHOANNA

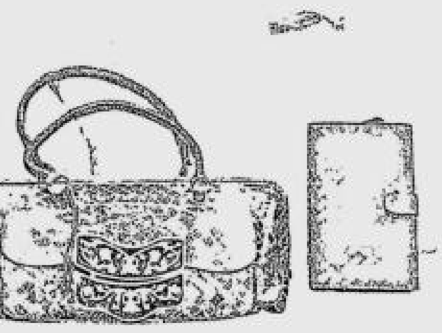
Thank you for your concern and for your very kind words. I'm glad to know I've had an impact in your life.

As Keeper of Esoteric Wisdom in ancient Egypt, I hoarded knowledge and gave it only to the priesthood. I kept the masses of people ignorant. You were probably one of those from whom I had kept this knowledge and now I am repaying my karmic debt to you and to the rest of the people whom I had kept unaware of the truth.

It is up to you whether to accept or reject these teachings. I know them to be true. But each must decide for himself or herself what is true for him/her.

Hope this explanation helps. Thanks for your interest in my work. Your inner journey has only just begun.

Tips for luxury shoppers



LEICA Carpo's top picks: Veneta bag in sale lambskin (back), Karung seasnake bag (left), Bottega Veneta continental Pompei wallet

SEASONED SHOPPERS LIKE LEICA Carpo, Cecille Ysmael, Elbert Cuenca, Miguel Ramos, and couple Felicia and Kim Atienza, Metrobank Platinum Card holders all, offer helpful tips for fellow shoppers.

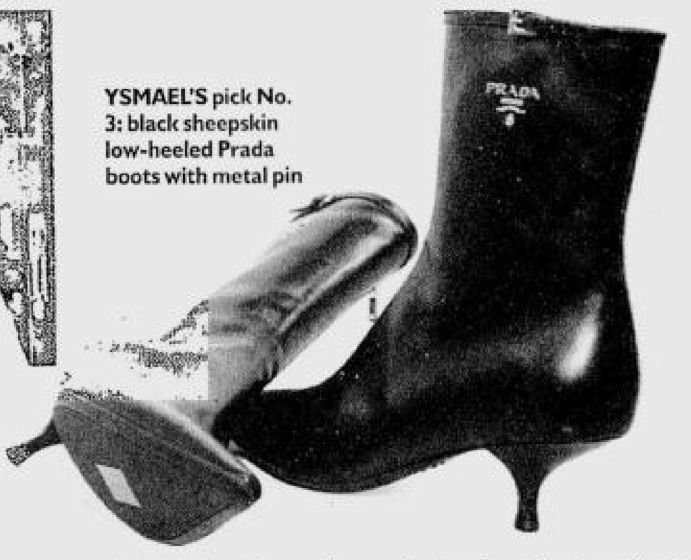
Fashionista Carpo suggests brands that are dependable and to take good care of any expensive purchase. A pair of Gucci pumps, a Ferragamo Sabbia Tabacco handbag, a Veneta Bag in sale lambskin and a Bottega Veneta Continental Pompei wallet are just some items on her list.

For chef and restaurateur Ysmael, a Bottega Veneta white bag, gold Gucci eyewear, low-heeled Prada boots, a Gucci blue belt bag. a Boss brown suede jacket for husband Louie and a Britt mystic white Gucci stilettos are must-haves. She says, though she has a budget, she often exceeds that for the family.

Cuenca says he lets his wife take care of his Christmas shopping. Since it's Christmas, the time to let go of some savings for the sake of giving, he does not worry too much about the budget.

A certified techie like Cuenca, Ramos says, though it may not be necessary to give something during Christmas, if one does it should be something the recipient will truly appreciate.

CHEF Cecille Ysmael



YSMAEL'S pick No. 3: black sheepskin low-heeled Prada boots with metal pin

Shoppers like Carpo, Ysmael, Cuenca, Ramos and the Atienzas rely on their Metrobank Platinum MasterCard as they don't just get a generous credit limit but also world-class privileges including benefits and rewards, local and international air miles, and a 24/7 exclusive customer assistance hotline. Metrobank Platinum MasterCard also has wide merchant acceptability.

The sound of fitness

From page C1

a portable music source while walking or cycling.

If you listen to music during your outdoor workouts, be sure to keep the volume low so you can hear the cars speeding by. Also, be aware that the speed of the music will dictate the speed at which you walk or cycle. Your body will automatically respond to the beat.

You can buy music made specifically for walking or cycling at websites like powermusic.com, workoutmusic.com and aerobicsmusic.com.

Group exercise music speed plays a big role in injury prevention. For example, step aerobics music that is too fast can adversely affect the biomechanics of the whole body, eventually causing problems in the lower back, knees and heels. The same goes for kickboxing. Shoulders and elbows are also compromised.

Music should be fast enough to challenge class participants but not so fast that proper alignment and execution are sacrificed. Step aerobics should be done to the speed of 124-130 beats per minute while kickboxing is safe at 135-145 beats per minute.

Group exercise music can also damage your hearing if played too loudly. Hearing loss doesn't happen overnight. It is seldom painful and it is cumulative. So you may be going deaf without realizing it.

Ideal volume

IDEA, the International Association for Fitness Professionals, says music volume should be kept below 90 decibels and the instructor's voice below 100 decibels.

According to the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA), normal conversation ranges 60-70 decibels, an alarm clock going off two feet from your ear is about 80 decibels, a chain saw is 100, and a jet plane takeoff or a rock concert may reach 120. Both IDEA and ASHA recommend using a sound level meter in group exercise rooms to monitor the decibel level.

Since most fitness centers do not own a sound level meter, here is a practical way to tell if the music is too loud. Before going to class, set a radio at the lowest volume possible with the words still understandable. After the class, check if you can still understand the words at that volume. If not, you are probably damaging your hearing.

Inform your gym that the music is too loud or use earplugs in class.

Note: Yoga Manila will host a series of Ashtanga workshops by Clay Horton Jan. 6-13. Horton was a student of Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, modern-day guru of the Ashtanga yoga system, and the Greensufi. Call 0917-522YOGA or e-mail yogamanila@gmail.com.

Visit www.tinajuanfitness.info

CLIP & SAVE

EXERCISE OF THE WEEK

Basic ab crunch

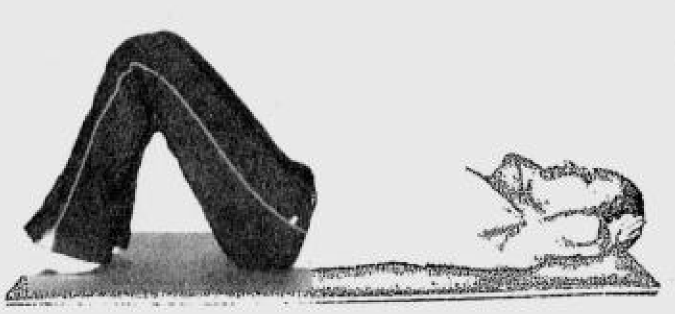
THIS CLASSIC ABDOMINAL exercise strengthens the straight muscle (*rectus abdominis*) and diagonal muscle (internal obliques). Strong internal obliques help keep your back strong.

Equipment

Exercise mat

Exercise technique

1. Keep your feet about 18 inches away from your buttocks.
2. Put both hands behind your head.
3. Initiate the movement by contracting the abdominal muscles to bring the ribcage and pelvis closer to each other.
4. Your head, neck and shoulders will automatically come up off the floor.
5. Slowly lower to an inch off the mat. Repeat.

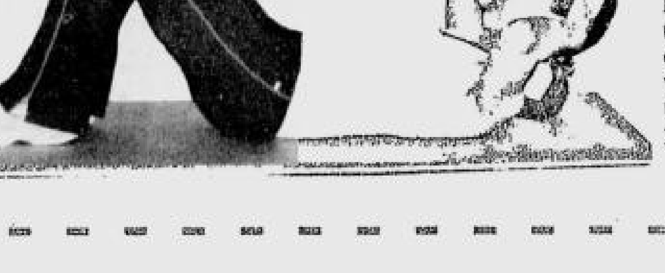


Performance tips

1. You should feel like an accordion—folding in the middle as the ribcage and hips come closer to each other.
2. Exhale as you execute the crunch; inhale as you return to starting position.
3. Keep your neck and shoulders relaxed.
4. Avoid thrusting your head forward as you start the crunch. Get the power for the movement from the abdominal muscles.
5. Keep your elbows diagonally to your sides—keep them away from your face—to avoid pulling on your neck.
6. Keep your chin about a fist distance from your chest. If you look up at the ceiling, your head is too far back. If you look at your chest, your head is too far forward. You should be looking through your legs a little below your knees.

Repetitions

Do 15 slow repetitions.



MEDICard The healthcare I Deserve

Take Charge Doc!

What is cancer and its causes?

Cancer is a group of many related diseases that begin in cells, the body's basic unit of life. The body is made up of many types of cells. Normally, cells grow and divide to produce more cells only when the body needs them. This orderly process helps keep the body healthy. Sometimes, however, cells keep dividing when new cells are not needed. These extra cells form a mass of tissue called a growth or tumor. But not all tumors are cancerous or malignant. Some are benign tumors, which are not cancer. They can often be removed and, in most cases, they do not come back. Cells from benign tumors do not spread to other parts of the body. Most important, benign tumors are rarely a threat to life. Malignant tumors are cancer. Cells in these tumors are abnormal and divide without control or order. They can invade and damage nearby tissues and organs. Also, cancer cells can break away from a malignant tumor and enter the bloodstream or the lymphatic system. That is how cancer spreads from the original cancer site to form new tumors in other organs. The spread of cancer is called metastasis. Cancer develops over time. It is a result of a complex mix of factors related to lifestyle, heredity, and environment. Many types of cancer are related to the use of tobacco, what people eat and drink, exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun, and, to a lesser extent, exposure to cancer-causing agents or carcinogens, such as cancer-causing viruses or those found in the environment and the workplace. Still, most people who get cancer have none of the known risk factors. And most people who do have risk factors do not get the disease.

This week's answer to our feature question was provided by our medical service provider at Chong Hua Hospital in Cebu City. Dr. Buenaventura C. Ramos Jr. Dr. Bill, as he is commonly addressed by his patients, specializes in IM-Oncology. He finished his medical degree at Cebu Institute of Medicine. He took his residency training for Internal Medicine at UP-PGH in 1997 and later obtained his subspecialty training for Oncology in 1999 at the same institution. He is a fellow of the Philippine College of Physicians, Philippine Society of Medical Oncology, Philippine Society of Oncologists and Pain Society of the Philippines. He is married and blessed with one child. MEDICard members may visit him at Chong Hua Hospital at Suite 505-B MAC, Monday thru Saturday from 10am-12noon.

MEDICard's Medical Director, Dr. Nicky Montoya answers questions on health through the assistance and expertise of MEDICard's network of accredited specialists. Write to Dr. Nicky or E-mail him at inquiry@medicardphils.com for your inquiries on health matters.

Nicky

MEDICard [illegible]

Promises, promises

INSIDE OUT

Cory Quirino

ANOTHER YEAR ENDS, A NEW ONE BEgins. What is it about endings and beginnings that put us in a reflective, and ultimately, reconstructive mood?

Six R's are involved in reconstructing the self. Even if you have not kept promises made each time you welcome a new year, it's never too late.

Retrieve

Reconstruction means rebuilding something that has come undone, like a body that is overworked or neglected. Locate your old list and reread it. Go over every item and evaluate your performance against expectations. If you never made a list, now is as good a time as any to start.

Review

Scan your old list. See how much or how little you accomplished and what should be moved to your new list. Look at new ways to improve your resolutions.

Rewrite

Sit down in a comfortable corner of your room. Close your eyes for a minute or two. Seek guidance before you prepare your new list and let the spirit move you as you write.

A tip to remember is to set categories: body, mind, spirit; or look good, feel good, do good; or, to be more specific: health, career, love. Whatever seems more meaningful, take it. You may wish to limit yourself to what is doable, set a timeline or deadline.

Renew

The nature and success of all relationships is supposed to reflect your relationship with yourself. Stop for a moment and ask yourself: "How good am I to myself?"

In his book "The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success," Deepak Chopra says if you have insecurities over money, success, beauty and others in your life, these say something about your own nature. The key is to work on the self toward renewal.

Take a good look at yourself. If you are totally down, then there is no other way but up. If you are midway between your dreams and their manifestation, then there is also no other way but up.

One can only change if one believes. So believe that you can and you will have all you believe in. You can reinvent yourself.

Revive

Dreams can only soar when you give them wings. If you've have a dream that you have put on hold, let it take flight. Give it the freedom of expression it requires to manifest. Reviving a feeling/love, ambition, ideal, career is just an intention away. If it will contribute to your personal growth, then it has to become a reality.

Reward

If you have not rewarded yourself for your good deeds, do it now. Assuming you have done so, know that, for example, a healthier lifestyle has its rewards, too, like more energy, better complexion, general good health.

While on this subject, here are reward suggestions:

1. Do that one thing you've long wanted to do for yourself whatever it may be. Perhaps it is to go parasailing over Boracay, changing the color of your hair, taking up voice lessons or performing in a stage play. Let your imagination take over.

2. Practical kindness. Start by doing acts of kindness to yourself and then to others.

3. Every day, compliment yourself before the mirror. Find something you consider attractive in yourself.

As your attitude changes, so does your mood and so do your actions and finally, so will your life.

New year's tip

Welcome newness into your health regimen by adding another fruit or vegetable like pineapple and broccoli. Both have immune-boosting nutrients.

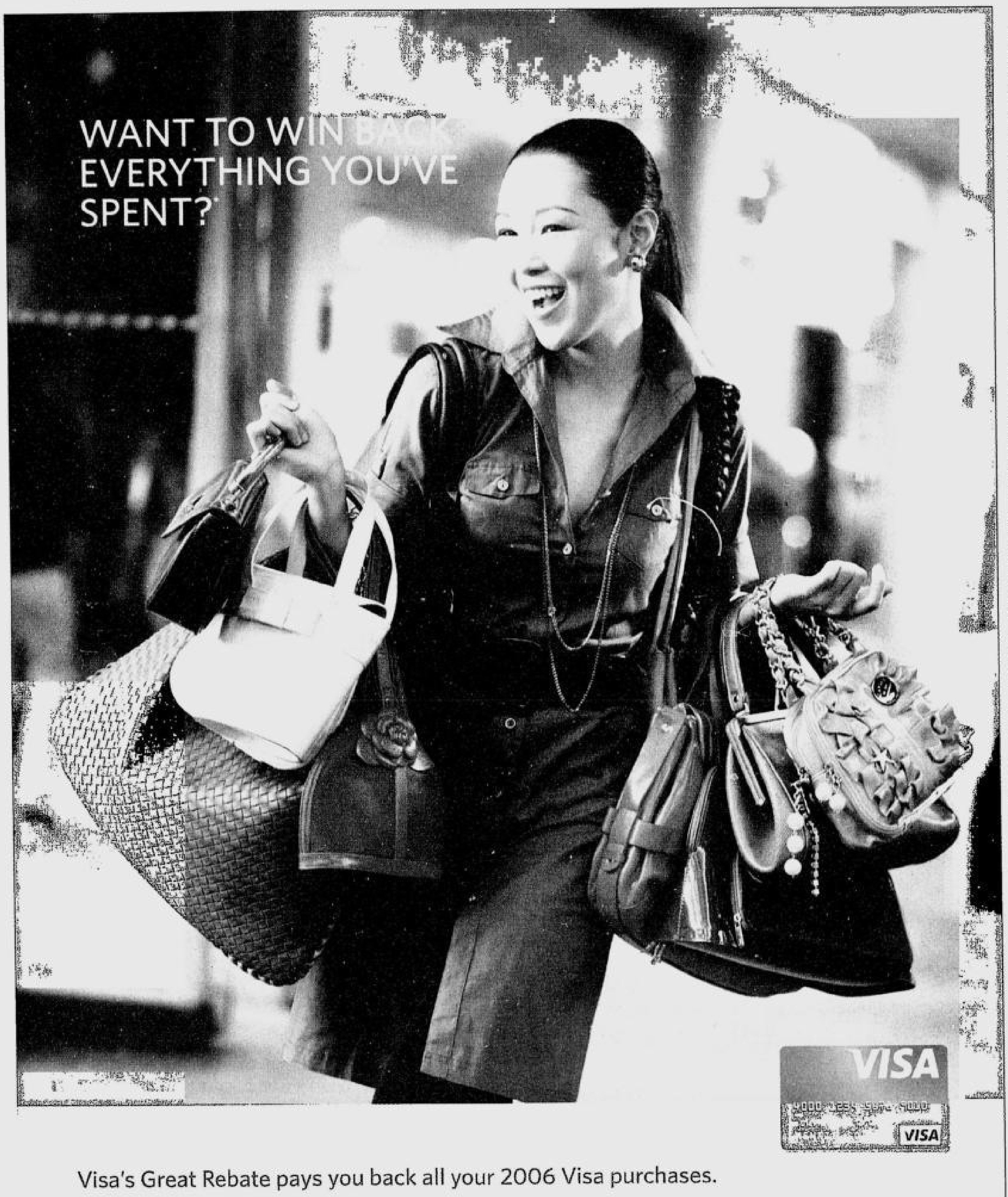
New year's dip

Soak in a tub of bubbles. Yes, have a bubble bath. Add more zing by throwing in lemon slices. Great skin softener and mood lifter.

2007 affirmation

"I am my own best promise to myself."
Love and light!

> Keep in mind six R's if you plan to reconstruct yourself this new year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Registration may be done through SMS. Text the following details to 2361 for Globe and 325 for Smart:
a. Full name (as it appears on the card)
b. First 6 digits of the account number
c. Last 4 digits of the account number
d. Amount of transaction
e. Date of transaction
f. Time of transaction (24-hour format)
Ex. VISA Mennie So, 400000, 1234, 1000.25 ,111206, 1808
Visa transactions may also be registered through the Promo website. (www.hblmasia.com/visa)
Draws will be conducted bi-weekly starting November 21, 2006 (total of 6 winners).
Promo period: November 12, 2006 - January 30, 2007

VISA
All it takes.

Per DTI-NCR Permit no. 4136. Series of 2006. See posters for details
*Visa purchases from January 1, 2006 up to a day before the draw date or December 31, 2006, whichever comes first, or up to a maximum of P500,000 net of withholding tax.

SPECIAL holiday wine box for premium organic wines from Healthy Options

A journey to good health

EATING ALL-NATURAL, ORGANIC AND additives-free food may seem like a tall order but it can be done. Healthy Options managing director Romy Sia says it also needs a commitment to change one's lifestyle specially this new year.

Five servings of fruits and vegetables daily provide the system with all the vitamins, minerals, disease-fighting anti-oxidants and body-cleansing fiber. Water is better than sugary sodas and powdered juices. Meals with healthy, natural ingredients have long-term benefits compared to cheaper, more convenient fast-food.

Sia says Healthy Options healthful alternatives to food, drinks and personal-care products can help jump-start people's journey to good health.

Healthy Options continues to offer the gift of wellness in festively designed gift bags and boxes.

Watercolor master Edgar Doctor's specially commissioned work appears on the boxes and bags ranging from bag for a single bottle of organic wine to bags or boxes for Organic Harvest, a set of natural and organic products. Doctor's artwork depicts the Philippines' festive Yuletide season.

You can get a customer assistant to help you put together a "Create Your Own Gift Pack" bag or box. Or give the convenient and handy Healthy Options Gift Cards in P200, P500 and P1,000 denominations.

A P2,000 minimum total purchase entitles you to one Healthy Options art calendar featuring paintings by Doctor and *feng shui*-inspired mixed-media creations by Lizanne Uychaco.

Healthy Options has branches at 1/L, Shangri-La Plaza Mall, Mandaluyong; Rustan's Supermarket, Makati City; 2/L, Festival Supermall, Fil-invest, Alabang; G/F, Ayala Center, Cebu City; LG/F, SM City, North Edsa; 2/F, SM City Manila; Greenbelt, Ayala Center, Makati City; 2/F, SM Megamall B, Mandaluyong City; SM Pampanga; SM Sta. Rosa, Laguna; SM Mall of Asia and SM Clark. Visit www.healthyoptions.com.ph.

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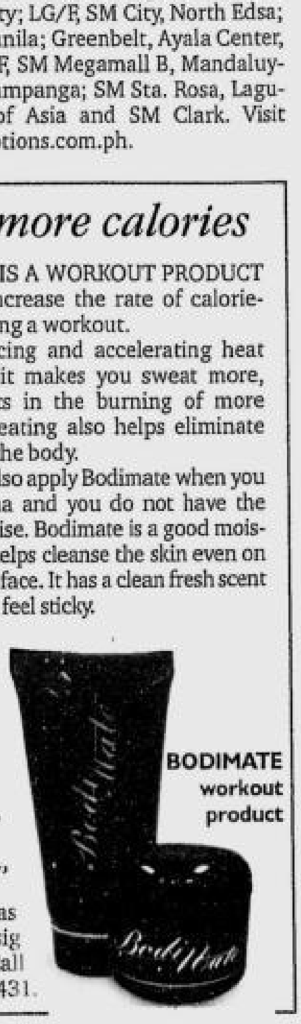
BODIMATE, IS A WORKOUT PRODUCT that helps increase the rate of calorie-burning during a workout.

By enhancing and accelerating heat production, it makes you sweat more, which results in the burning of more calories. Sweating also helps eliminate toxins from the body.

You may also apply Bodimate when you use the sauna and you do not have the time to exercise. Bodimate is a good moisturizer and helps cleanse the skin even on the neck and face. It has a clean fresh scent and does not feel sticky.

Bodimate is exclusively distributed by HDI Network, 3/F, Suite 302, Jollibee Plaza Bldg., Emerald Ave., Ortigas Center, Pasig City. Call 6352433/2431.

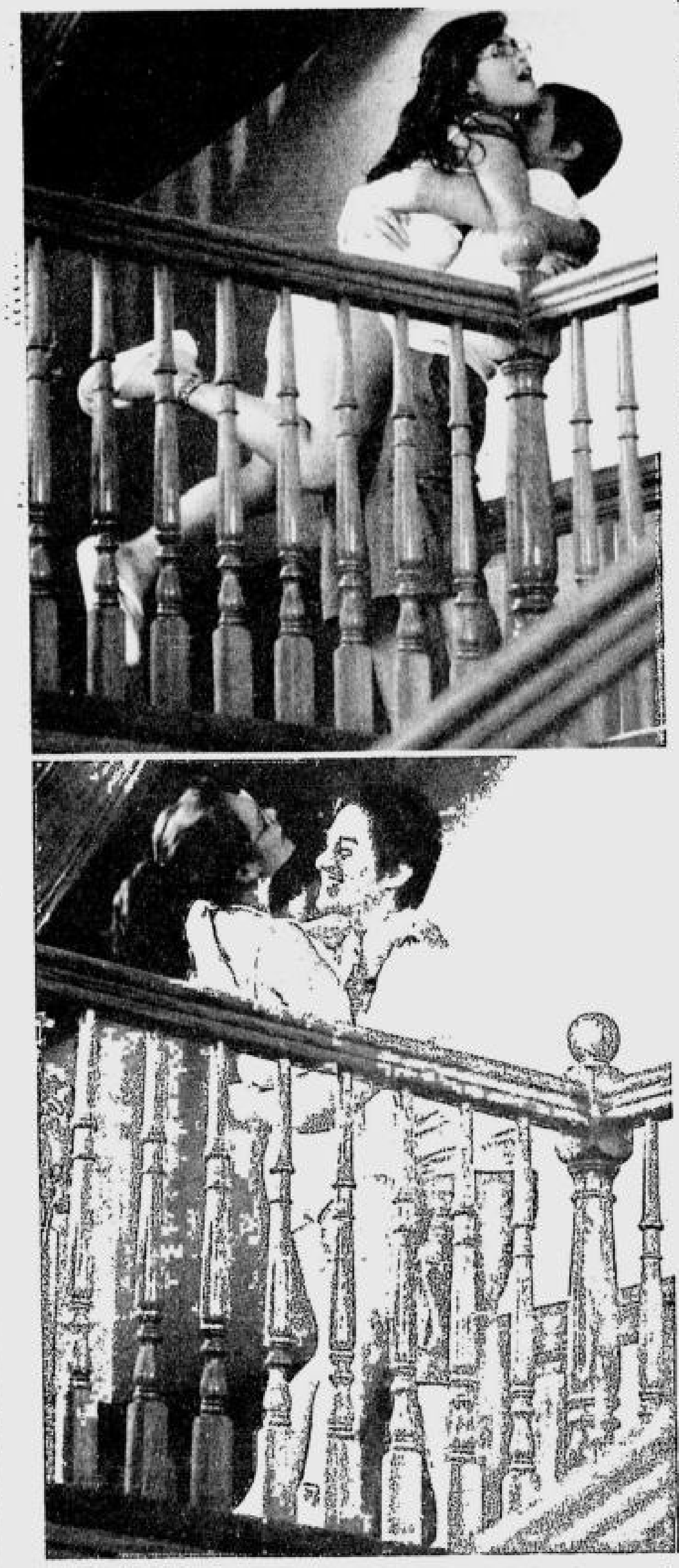


BODIMATE workout product

ENTERTAINMENT

Editor **Emmie G. Velarde**
sms feedback: inquirer ent name/age/city/message to 2207 (Globe) and 283 (Smart) or email us at pr_entertainment@inquirer.com.ph

FUN SNAPS FROM 2006



NOT ALL PLAY-ACTING. Real-life sweethearts Judy Ann Santos and Ryan Agoncillo warm up behind the cameras during the shoot of "Kasal, Kasali, Kasalo." PDI's Romy Homillada took these hot shots.

MMFF: What exactly was there to be festive about?

By Anna Leah Sarabia
Contributor

REVIEW

I HAD NOT SEEN SO MUCH violence in the Metro Manila Film Festival until now.

I'm talking about senseless, bloody, gory killings where the victims are clueless, vulnerable and totally helpless women and young people—and authorities who are completely incompetent, indifferent, or too corrupt to protect them against despots, vampires, ghosts and psychos.

If this festival is symbolic of our national state of mind and not just the film industry's revelry in slaughterhouses, there is a need for collective purging in this yearend ritual.

No one can save women and children who live far away from neighbors, where ghastly creatures lurk, specially when the men are working abroad. No one bothers to explain how the police would allow passengers to be torn apart by a monster in a train terminal.

How much fear and hopelessness do we as a people feel nowadays? Is this the reason that audiences look forward to this annual circus of flying super-heroes, cloaked swordsmen on horseback, and good-doing fairies?

Bright spot

At least a few of the superheroes are female or gay. Note, too, that the one entry with a gay lead casts strong women as the *contravidas*.

Looks like once upon a time in the Stone Age as far as gender issues are concerned, except that it's gay men fighting *amazonistas* to save a, well, masculine man.

Back in Metro Manila urban life, two festival entries try to outline more familiar scenarios of young people in love. Arriving at the ideal position of couple-hood isn't easy, whether you are Chinese-Filipino or Filipino-Filipino. Problem is, assertive and bright young women are paired with tongue-tied half-wits who aren't

MMFF/ D2

POPS Fernandez and ZsaZsa Padilla in "Zsa zsa Zaturnnah". At least some characters with super-powers were women.

What stars will dare do for the first time in '07

DOLLY WOOD

Dolly Anne Carvajal

WHY NOT TRY DOING SOMEthing this 2007 that you've never done before? As my fave quote goes, "If you're not living on the edge, then you are occupying too much space. Risk it!"

Here are what some stars will dare to do this year for the very first time. Then it's your turn. I double dare you to have the most adventurous year ever!

MARK HERRAS: "To have a GF *na pangmatagalan talaga*."

CARMINA VILLAROEL: "If I were still single, I'd try sky diving. But since I'm a mother already and my twins are still small, I can't die!"

JED MADELA: "To get into the movies. Preferably a horror or suspense film. I'd want to start out doing small yet significant roles."

JANICE DE BELEN: "I still can't think of one thing I haven't done. It seems I've been through it all *na*. But before trying anything, I ask myself two questions—1. Can I afford it? 2. Will I die if I don't do it? It works every time.

DIETHER OCAMPO: "Produce an indie film that would be considered an important part of global cinema history."

VICKY MORALES: "To have a baby!"

JEREMY MARQUEZ: "To stay single although I might get lonely. I'm sure I'll get used to it *naman*. I dread going through another break-up."

CES DRILON: "To build a house and write a book."

MARVIN AGUSTIN: "Go all over Europe and travel to India. I also want to co-write a script and do a full-length digital movie."

TIN-TIN BERSOLA: "To have a baby boy! Anya is turning 2 *na*

WHAT STARS/ D4

this week @ SM City FAIRVIEW
The colors of the season captured in the sparkling festival of lights!
CITY OF SAN FERNANDO
Giant Lantern Festival
City of San Fernando Pampanga, Philippines
SM CITY FAIRVIEW
JAN. 5-6 FRI-SAT
PM-10PM

DID YOU KNOW...

Over 300 vie for top plum

LOS ANGELES—More than 300 films are eligible for the coveted Best Picture prize at next year's Oscars ceremony, Academy Awards organizers said Thursday.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences said 307 feature films were qualified for the top honor, which will be handed out in Hollywood on Feb. 25.

To be eligible for the 79th Academy Awards, the films must open in a commercial theater in Los Angeles County by midnight on Dec. 31 and run for a minimum of seven consecutive days.

The Oscar nominations will be announced on Jan. 23.

Among the early front-runners are Martin Scorsese's crime thriller "The Departed"; Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's drama "Babel"; Clint Eastwood's "Letters from Iwo Jima"; Stephen Frears' "The Queen" and musical "Dreamgirls". *AFP*

LORNA TOLENTINO
GINA ALAJAR
TIRSO CRUZ III
BOOTS ANSON-ROA
CHRISTIAN BAUTISTA
RICHARD GUTIERREZ
ANGEL LOCSIN
我愛你
MANO PO 5
GUA AI DI (I LOVE YOU)
MS. JACLYN KETCHUP MICHELLE ETHEL AJ IRMA TONY JIM LORENZO JOYCE ELLA SAM
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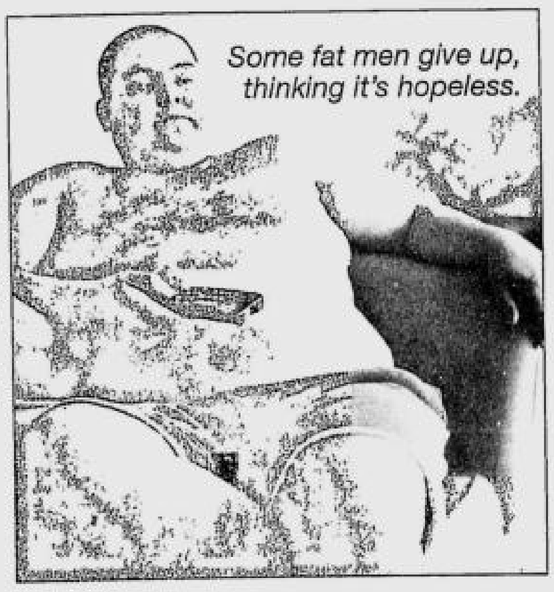

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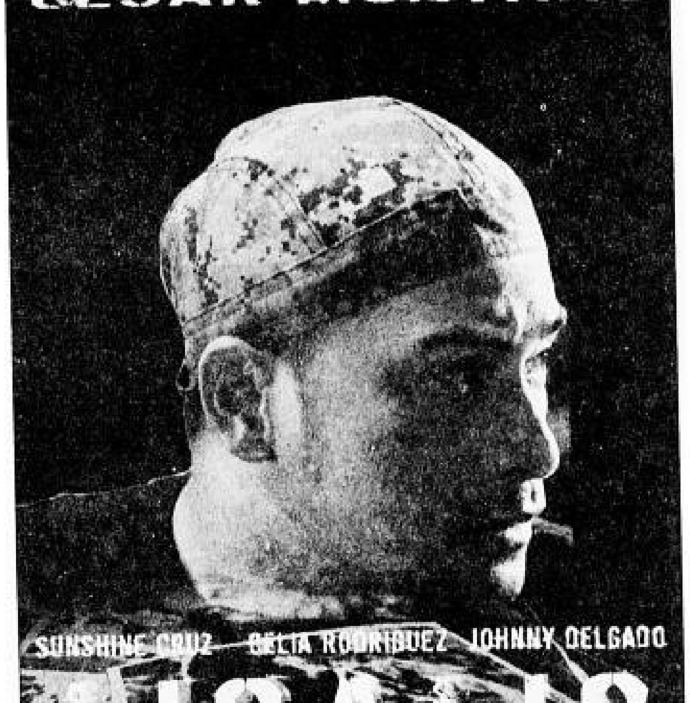

SUNSHINE CRUZ CELIA RODRIGUEZ JOHNNY DELGADO
LIGALIG
KATYA SANTOS BAYANI AGBAYANI JOHN REGALA
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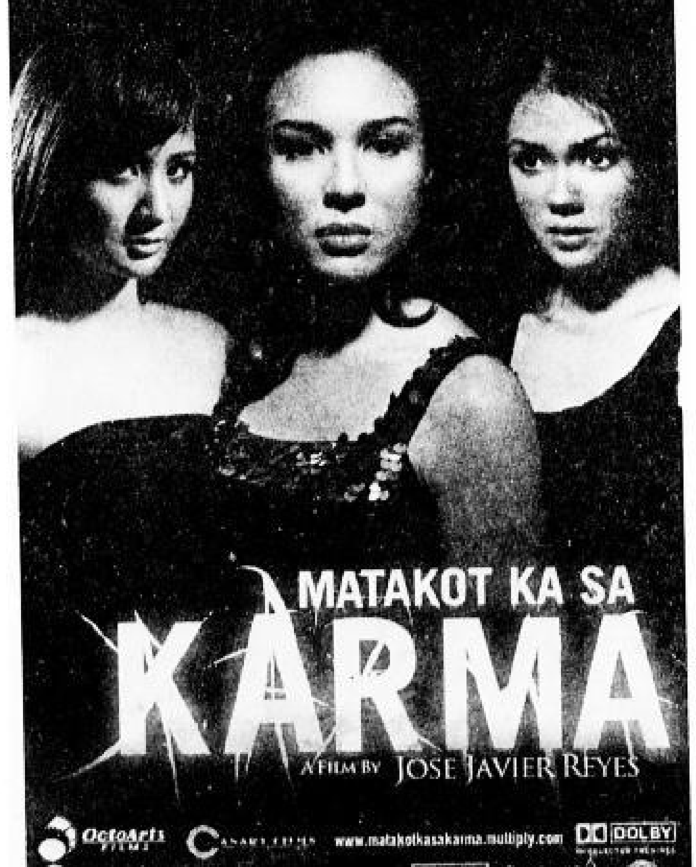

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MANO PO 5: GUA AI DI G 12:30,3:00,5:30	ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH G 11:30,1:40,3:50,6:00	KASAL, KASALI, KASALO PG13 11:30,1:40,3:50,6:00

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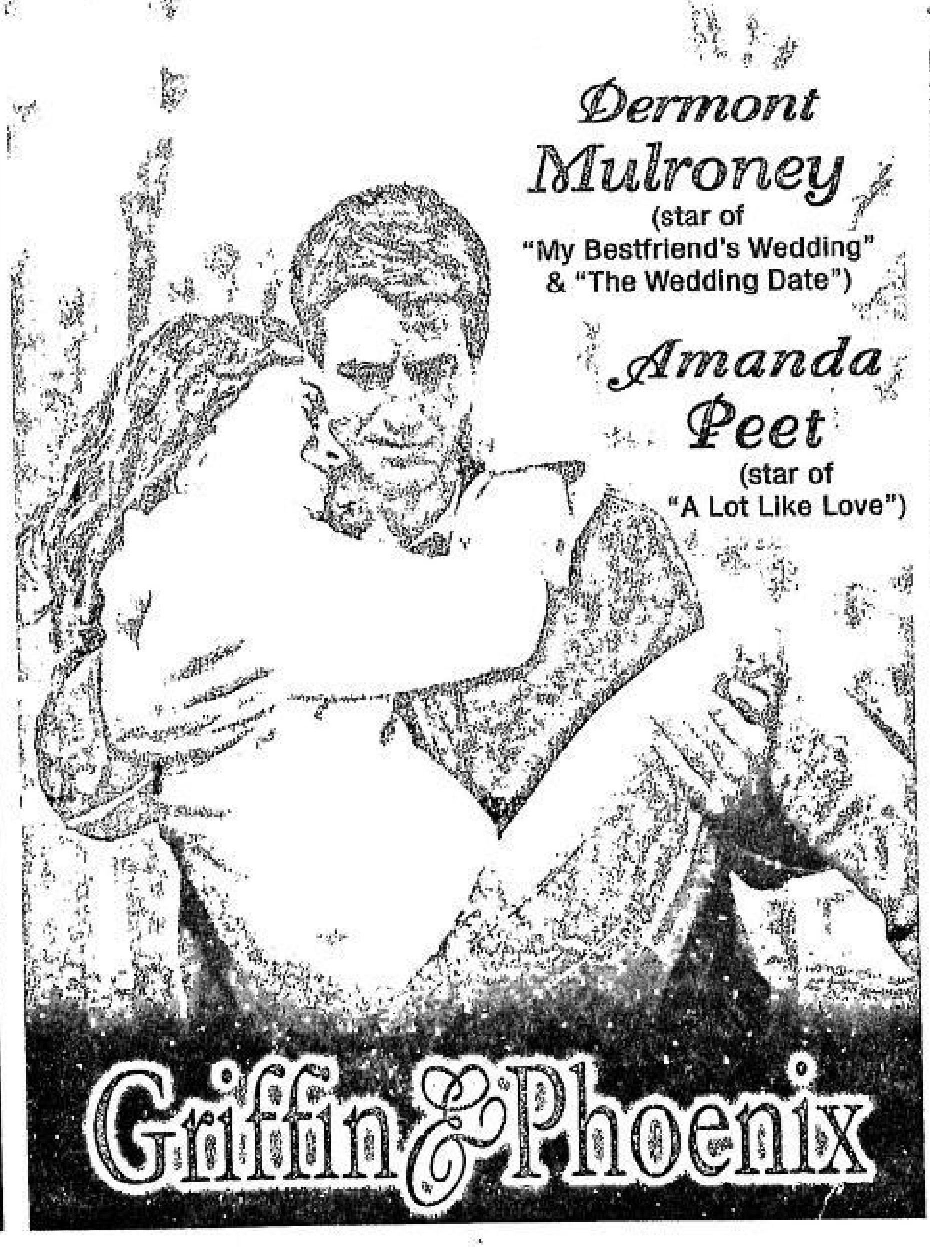

Dermont Mulroney
(star of "My Bestfriend's Wedding" & "The Wedding Date")
Amanda Peet
(star of "A Lot Like Love")
Griffin & Phoenix

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

These acting greats showed range, depth and scope

WHEN I JOINED THE THEATER and entertainment fields, I wasn't prepared for the challenges that came my way. It's a good thing that a number of stars were only too willing to help me find my way through the maze of tests that confronted me, by way of their advice or unspoken example.

As an actor, I learned a lot about love for the theater from **Bert** and **Daisy Avellana.** They had spent their lives acting in and/or directing plays and films without much recompense, and yet they forged on, their standards as high as ever.

From my fellow actors, I learned the most from **Vic Silayan, Tita Muñoz, Ching Dadufalga, Aurelio Estanislao, Zeneida Amador, Mitos Sison, Tommy Abuel, Edgar Oira, Cris Vertido, Mitch Valdes** and **Teddy Yabut.**

Each in his or her own unique way, these acting greats showed me the range, depth and scope that the best and most daring thespians could reach out for. When they performed, the stage or screen blazed with life and white-hot artistry, and viewers were moved, inspired, illuminated and transformed.

On television, **Fr. James B. Reuter, S.J.,** taught me how much could be achieved with very few resources—and a lot of creativity, determination and just plain hard work.

No excuses! Produce! Stop complaining!—That's the spirit.

Directing the **Lardizabal, Jos** **Cantada** and. learned how in personality and transforming a unique viewing

Other aspec hosting could b host's essence alone, and cou thentically repr

I learned th **Elvira Manahar** rect her on "T (before she ask the show with vived it years la

Talk about b was a comple beauty, verve, tense emotion moods, childli laughter, and "Two for the "natural wond descent display.

But the best from Elvira we sort: How deep go, and how d make even an out to be really cial, if we only its fullest.

From Boots learned that y and flourish i without selling Devil—or his h the industry

From Rita G

Just can't get enc

SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA—Hollywood couple Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt can't seem to get enough of this tourist-friendly Central American nation.

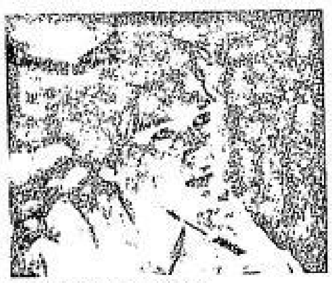
After spending Christmas Day here with Colombian refugees, the actors were set on ringing in 2007 at the exclusive Four Seasons Resort in Papagayo on Costa Rica's northern Pacific coast, La Nacion newspaper reported.

RUSHES

A telephone call to Pitt's publicist in Beverly Hills, California, was not immediately returned.

Accompanied by their three children, a nanny and a personal chef, the Jolie-Pitt entourage, registered as "the Black family," stayed at the resort 250 kilometers northwest of the capital, according to the report.

Pitt starred in the 1998 movie "Meet Joe Black." *AP*



RENEE ZELLWEGER

ANGELINA Jo they spent Chr

Much ado about Renee

NEW YORK—American Renee Zellweger doesn't know what all the fuss is over her playing British women.

Zellweger created a stir several years ago when she landed the coveted role of the lonely London "singleton" Bridget Jones, adapted from Helen Fielding's best-selling book "Bridget Jones's Diary." She famously took speech lessons before landing the part, beating a host of British actresses.

Now she is playing another British figure in "Miss Potter," a biopic of English literary phenomenon Beatrix Potter, whose early 20th century children's books, including "The Tale of Peter Rabbit," remain bestsellers.

Acclaimed British actors Emily Watson and Ewan McGregor play mere supporting roles opposite the petite blond Tex a Golden Globe for the role.

But Zellweg pared to the fict playing Potter, brought differe

"I guess the are clearly mo point," Zellweg in an intervie Helen Fielding acter that was culture, but Be the fiber of Br very substantial

She said of glish accent: "I part of the pro exciting to talk the language Texas, I guess.

The amicabl ly positive ab While she is British roles, sh felt a calling.

"I love Britis and the way communicate. and Paul M comes from

Broken vert

WASHINGTON ward Norton broke three during a ho accident on his new roma ma, "The Paint

MMFF: What ex

From page D1

sure what to do with their own lives, much less commit to a relationship (although they redeem themselves after almost losing the women).

So why do these women have to marry them? Isn't there a storyline somewhere that respects women who are smart, can have fun and will have a wonderful life, without a man messing it up? Ah, maybe not in this society, nor in this decade.

In the meantime, we will have to content ourselves with empowered career women (who in real life are not usually as loud as gay me are not theless and bo inspiri again g nopoli must back t really

The MMFF Award

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…t me

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…mez, the entertaining possibilities of a life acted in front of the camera and beyond. From **Eddie Romero**, that talent can flourish and must be put to use even into an artist's 80s—and after!

From **Sharon Cuneta**, that wearing one's heart on one's sleeve can be risky—and brave.

From **Nora Aunor**, that you can be your own worst enemy—but, when push comes to shove, sheer talent will always emerge triumphant!

NGC's Watch and Win promo

The National Geographic Channel's Watch and Win promo invites viewers to watch NGC's "Inside" series and log on to www.ngcasia.com and answer questions related to each episode, and include their personal details. "Inside" is a documentary show that gives viewers a sneak peek into the huge amount of work put into organizing some of the world's biggest events. Watch "Inside" every Monday at 9 p.m. The promo ends on Dec. 31.

Remaining episodes: Jan. 1, "Hong Kong's Big Bang" (over a half million tourists are expected to join seven million Hong Kong residents to celebrate the Year of the Dog). Jan. 8, "Speed Week" (each year, thousands of hot-rodders make a pilgrimage to the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah to go as fast as their wheels allow).

…ugh of Costa Rica

…e and Brad Pitt meet a Colombian refugee family as …stmas Day in the Costa Rican capital. AFP

…n, who has earned
…ward nomination

…r says that com-
…nal Bridget Jones,
…ho died in 1943,
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…, 37, told Reuters
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…rix was a part of
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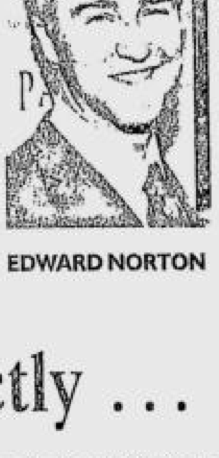
Norton said a horse threw him off while he was galloping before filming a scene for the movie, directed by John Curran, which was shot entirely in China.

"One of those horses chucked me off pretty badly," the 37-year-old actor told AP Radio News in a recent interview. "I broke my spine in like three places. I broke my back. I broke three vertebrae in my back."

"I felt like my back was horribly wrenched but I sort of assumed I was OK, and I didn't actually find out I had broken it until I went to Hong Kong," he said. "I cracked my 10th, 11th and especially my 12th thoracic vertebrae."

Though he generally keeps a low profile, Norton said he was recognized while walking through an animal market on the border between China and Tibet.

"I saw this kid walk by me but then he disappeared and then like five minutes later I felt him creeping up, and he looked at me for a long time and he went 'Fight Club'? It tickled me that somewhere way out there, there was this kid who loved 'Fight Club,'" Norton said. *AP*

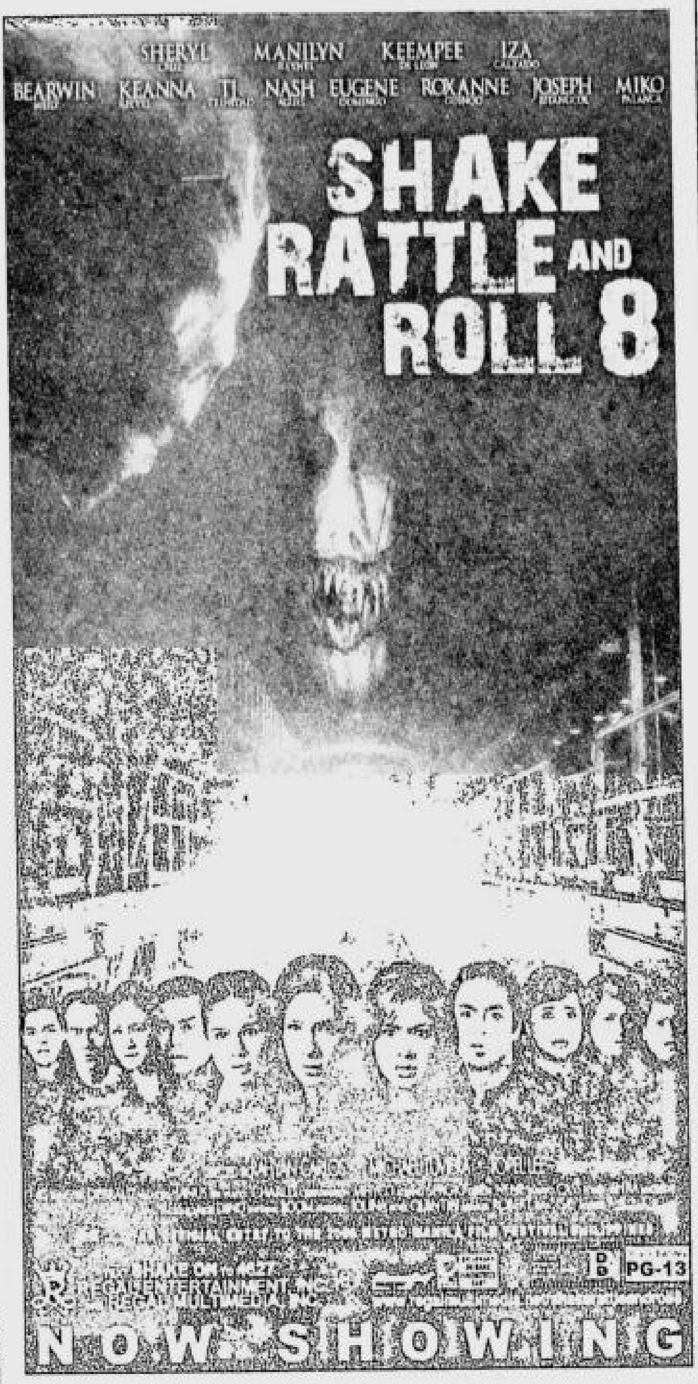


EDWARD NORTON

…actly …

…these movies) and effeminate …ho will give favor to men who … praiseworthy, but are, never…en. The role models for girls …n the MMFF this year are not …t all. If local producers are …n the privilege next year of mo… patronage for 10 days, they … something more substantial … audience. Otherwise, is there …h for us to be festive about?

…r. served as a juror for the … Most Gender-Sensitive Film



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Rustom Padilla
Alfred
Pauleen
Chokoleit
Christian
Say
and
Zsa Zsa Padilla
Carlo Vergara's
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2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
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3 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
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4 MANO PO 5
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5 MANO PO 5
6 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
7 LIGALIG
8 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

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1 SUPER NOYPI
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 RESERVE
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PIONEER 687-6378

1 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
4 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH

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4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
5 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8

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5 MANO PO 5

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2 MANO PO 5
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8

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2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
3 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
4 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
5 LIGALIG
6 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

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1 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 MANO PO 5
5 LIGALIG
6 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

BACOLOD (034) 441-0453 (034) 441-0459

1 MANO PO 5
2 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
5 THE NATIVITY STORY
6 SUPER NOYPI

ILOILO (033) 336-8070

1 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 MANO PO 5
4 SUPER NOYPI
5 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
6 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL 8

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VICKY MORALES

DIETHER OCAMPO

CARMINA VILLAROEL

What stars will dare . . .

From page D1

kasi!"

CHRISTIAN BAUTISTA: "I will learn how to play a musical instrument."

GINA ALAJAR: "To go on a cruise with a date."

FRANCIS MAGALONA: "To release a book of my photographs, go full blast in music, publishing and fashion. I plan to launch the book, album and my clothing line in one day by holding a free concert."

PIA GUANIO: "Not to complain. I've been so blessed! I have no reason to whine."

ASSUNTA DE ROSSI: "I want to focus on motherhood. It's about time!"

JOEY GENEROSO (Side A): "To do an all-original solo album. That would be a first in my entire career!"

SUNSHINE CRUZ: "Take up culinary lessons so I can cook yummy dishes for the bar/resto that Buboy and I plan to open soon."

MARK ANTHONY FERNANDEZ: "To bring my kids to Hong Kong Disneyland."

SUZIE ENTRATA: "To go on a weekend vacation with my husband. Ever since we had babies, we've never been away from home together."

PERSONAL

Thanks "H" for changing my world for the better. With you around, I know it will be a year of total bliss.

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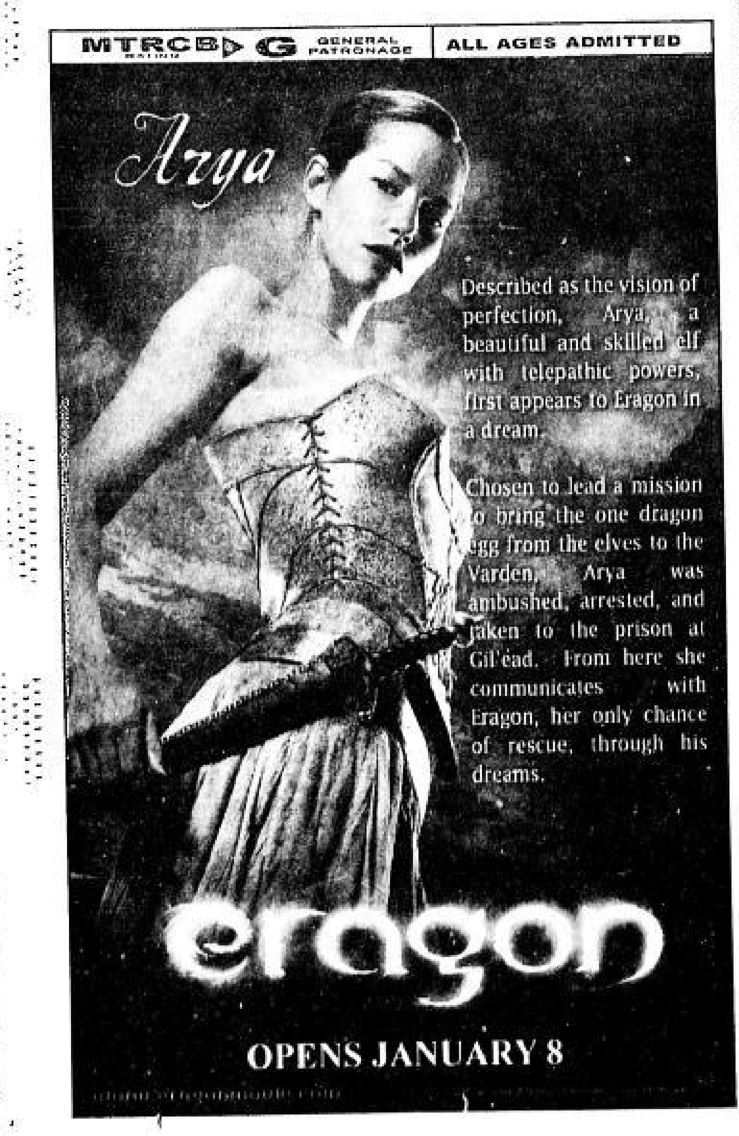


Described as the vision of perfection, Arya, a beautiful and skilled elf with telepathic powers, first appears to Eragon in a dream.

Chosen to lead a mission to bring the one dragon egg from the elves to the Varden, Arya was ambushed, arrested, and taken to the prison at Gil'ead. From here she communicates with Eragon, her only chance of rescue, through his dreams.

Pinoys love their rock bands

By Pocholo Concepcion
Contributor

TWO SEPARATE GIGS HELD ON THE SAME weekend recently offered contrasting views on how people connect with today's local bands.

Friday night at Metrowalk, Pasig, the 4th Winston Music Blast was winding up its "Wings Tour" with Kjwan, Pedicab, the Dawn, Urbandub, Pinup Girls, Imago, Sandwich, Parokya Ni Edgar and Bamboo.

A crowd of mostly young professionals filled the open-air square between rows of restaurants, whose staff was kept busy with non-stop orders of food and drinks.

Onstage, Marc Abaya and Maui Taylor tried to engage the audience in light banter. But this was a crowd that probably went out every weekend to unwind, often by watching bands and drinking with friends and officemates. Every now and then they would react to the hosts' jokes, but generally they looked detached, if still attentive to the band's performances.

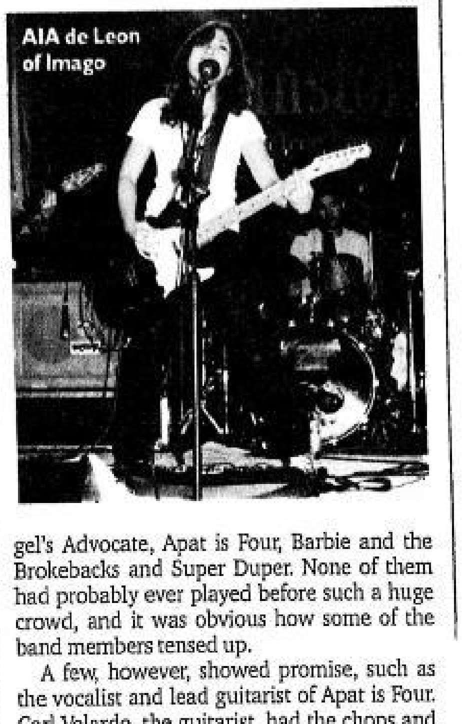
Not everyone was smoking cigarettes, even as Winston's promo girls constantly made the rounds offering sticks, even packs, of its products. For the non-smoker, catching a whiff of second-hand smoke was annoying enough to provoke a complaint, yet the irritant was ignored when the bands started cranking out the music.

BAMBOO

The Dawn sounded very tight. Vocalist Jett Pangan seems to be getting better with the passage of time. This band has been around for 20 years, but the fiery energy of drummer Jun Boy Leonor, complemented by the steady rhythms of bassist Buddy Zabala and burning lines of guitarist Francis Reyes, showed it was running on a powerful second wind.

Watching Urbandub, the Pinup Girls, Imago and Sandwich gave credence to the emergence of more female musicians on the scene. Imago's vocalist Aia de Leon and Sandwich's bassist Myrene Academia radiated charm and confidence that matched their performance levels.

Speaking of Sandwich, this is one band that has managed to kick up a storm in every gig—spurred on by the wild, punk persona of vocalist Raimund Marasigan. At the Metrowalk, he drove the laid-back audience, many of them woozy from drinking, to cheer up.



AIA de Leon of Imago

Like Beatlemania

Sunday, Dec. 17, at Cinema 3 of SM Southmall, a fundraiser organized by the Federation of Parents and Teachers Association of Las Piñas featured Spongecola with four amateur bands as front acts.

High anxiety was in the air, as long lines of elementary and high school kids formed outside the theater, all of them chatting at the same time and looking like they were about to see the Beatles.

Imagine the frenzied faces of fans at the height of Beatlemania, combined of course with the most ear-splitting shrieks, and you have a complete picture of the crowd at Southmall. They came to root not only for Spongecola, but also for the opening acts, most of which were classmates from the participating schools.

These acts had names like Angel's Advocate, Apat is Four, Barbie and the Brokebacks and Super Duper. None of them had probably ever played before such a huge crowd, and it was obvious how some of the band members tensed up.

A few, however, showed promise, such as the vocalist and lead guitarist of Apat is Four. Carl Velarde, the guitarist, had the chops and rock-star stance that would come in handy if and when he actually turns pro. But he should always be conscious of the volume level of his amps for his lead lines to be heard. (Or was it really toned down as a matter of practice by the sound technicians?)

When Spongecola took the stage, all hell broke loose.

The shrill voices of female fans were so piercing, many people had to plug their ears.

Emotions do run high, as more young people get their taste of enjoying a music scene that has become hotter than any global warming threat.

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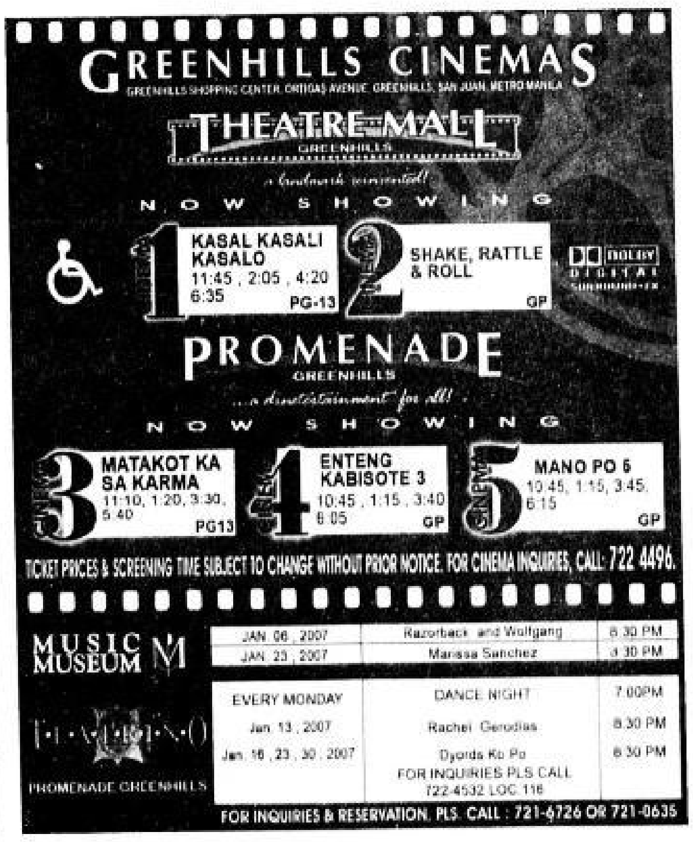
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1	KASAL KASALI KASALO 11:45 , 2:05 , 4:20 6:35	PG-13
2	SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL	GP
3	MATAKOT KA SA KARMA 11:10, 1:20, 3:30, 5:40	PG13
4	ENTENG KABISOTE 3 10:45 , 1:15 , 3:40 6:05	GP
5	MANO PO 5 10:45, 1:15, 3:45, 6:15	GP

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JAN 06 , 2007	Razorback and Wolfgang	8:30 PM
JAN 23 , 2007	Marissa Sanchez	8:30 PM
EVERY MONDAY	DANCE NIGHT	7:00PM
Jan 13 , 2007	Rachel Gerodias	8:30 PM
Jan 16 , 23 , 30 , 2007	Dyords Ko Po FOR INQUIRIES PLS CALL 722-4532 LOC 116	8:30 PM

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Cerrudo performs for typhoon victims

"TONIGHT WE LOVE," A BENEfit concert for the victims of Typhoon Reming, features Bimbo Cerrudo with the Manila Philharmonic Orchestra on Feb. 9 at the Music Museum and Feb. 23 at the Captain's Bar of Mandarin Oriental.

BIMBO CERRUDO

Melanj in Manila

Melanj on Ice is a combination of Las Vegas and Broadway—on ice. The show will be presented in Iloilo Jan. 17 to 21 at the CPU Gym. Manila performances are scheduled Feb. 1 to 11 at the Ninoy Aquino Stadium.

The cast includes US Olympians, internationally renowned stars, US Junior Nationals competitors, local performers and dancers and young skating stars.

Beneficiaries are the Bantay-Bata and Kapuso Foundation. Call 713-9907.

Lettermen back

The Lettermen returns to the Philippines this month for a series of shows that concludes with a major concert on Jan. 12, 8 p.m., at the Araneta Coliseum in Cubao, Quezon City.

"The Lettermen... More!" series opens with a dinner-show on Jan. 11 at Crowne Plaza Hotel. Guest artists are John Lesaca and Tots Tolentino.

Other shows are slated on Jan. 13, Clark Expo, Pampanga; Jan. 14, St. La Salle, Bacolod City; Jan. 15, Cebu Waterfront Hotel, Cebu City; Jan. 16, NCCC Mall, Davao City; and Jan. 17, Limketkai Mall, Cagayan de Oro City.

Call 911-5555.

Suzuki Kids

Three to 12-year-old Suzuki Music Kids entertain families at the malls this holiday season on Jan. 7, 4 p.m., at UP Abelardo Hall.

Piano prodigy Oliver Salonga performs for the benefit of the Asia Suzuki Congress in May 2007.

On Jan. 14, 2-5 p.m. at SM North Edsa, the Suzuki Kids entertain underprivileged children at the Snack-Mowelfund "Pagsalubong sa 2007."

Call 724-0705.

SHOW TIME

Tomorrow

Jojo A with Midnight Connection at RJTV Bar, Jupiter St., Makati

January 5

RJ 'n Friends with Moonstrucks at RJTV Bar, Jupiter St., Makati

January 7

Piano prodigy Oliver Salonga at UP Abelardo Hall; 4 p.m. Call 724-0705.

January 8

Elvis Night featuring RJ, Edgar Opida, Nonie Yambao and Lito Jauregui at RJTV Bar, Jupiter St., Makati

January 9

Jojo A with Dale Adriatico at RJTV Bar, Jupiter St., Makati

January 10

Jojo A with Midnight Connection at RJTV Bar, Jupiter St., Makati

January 12

The Lettermen at the Araneta Coliseum; 8 p.m.

THE LETTERMEN